

Inspection of St Martin's Academy Chester

91 Hoole Road, Chester, Cheshire CH2 3NG

Inspection dates:	3 and 4 December 2024
The quality of education	Outstanding
Behaviour and attitudes	Outstanding
Personal development	Outstanding
Leadership and management	Outstanding
Early years provision	Outstanding
Previous inspection grade	Outstanding

The headteacher of this school is Wenda Smith. This school is part of the North West Academies Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer (CEO), Stephen Docking OBE, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Nayland Southorn.

Until November 2020, the school was exempt from routine inspection because it was judged as outstanding for overall effectiveness at its previous inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. The school has not been inspected under section 5 of the Act since May 2015. Since September 2024, schools have not been awarded an overall effectiveness grade.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils at St Martin's achieve high levels of success in terms of their academic achievement and their personal development. They are exceptionally well-prepared for life beyond school. Pupils benefit from the school's high expectations and a clear focus on excellence, inspiration and care. Pupils appreciate the vast and varied experiences and opportunities that the school offers them. They enjoy visits to theatres, museums and participating in residential trips across the United Kingdom and further afield.

This vibrant and welcoming school is a very happy place to learn. Pupils' behaviour is exemplary. Adults apply their high expectations of behaviour and routines consistently, including in the early years. This sets the foundation for pupils' remarkable positive attitudes to their learning throughout the school. Pupils treat everyone around them with the utmost respect.

Pupils act as wonderful ambassadors for themselves and the school. For example, the elected school parliament set clear, specific action plans for the chosen committees, like the well-being or environmental group. Pupils raise money for selected charities such as the local hospital and hospice. They are ambitious to make a difference in the school and wider world in which they live.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

The school has successfully developed a highly ambitious curriculum for all its pupils. It has been designed to ensure that children in the early years, and pupils in the rest of the school, build on their prior learning confidently and successfully. The curriculum builds seamlessly from the Reception Year to Year 6.

From the time that children begin in the Reception Year, staff use their high levels of expertise to support pupils successfully. This includes the early identification of pupils who may have additional needs. Staff set high expectations for pupils' learning and help them to develop a highly impressive breadth of knowledge. Staff enable pupils to show the knowledge that they have built up in various ways such as through sound bites or visual representations. This helps all pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), to achieve exceptionally well.

Teachers revisit the knowledge that has been taught previously. They provide unparalleled support so that pupils keep up with the curriculum content that is being delivered. Staff address any gaps in pupils' understanding. These are swiftly identified through highly effective ongoing assessment strategies.

Pupils are able to hold exceptionally high-quality discussions about their learning. This is as a result of the exemplary design and delivery of the curriculum as well as the school's deliberate focus on pupils' communication skills. Pupils can talk confidently about how teachers weave key knowledge into every lesson. This helps them to successfully build a rich body of knowledge, across different subjects, which interconnects ideas, concepts and themes. This prepares pupils fully for the next stage of their learning.

The school has made reading a central feature of its curriculum offer. Pupils learn to read with fluency, starting right from day one in the Reception Year. Adults provide targeted support and ensure that children form the right sounds, know the corresponding letters and build stamina to write them successfully. Staff across school are experts in the teaching of reading and they use their knowledge very well to help weaker readers to keep up. As a result, pupils read with confidence and access challenging books for pleasure by the time they reach Year 2. Older pupils enjoy discussing, sharing and enjoying literature together. They recommend books and authors to each other and are appreciative of the recent additions to the 'tree of books' outside each classroom.

Pupils' attitudes to learning are exceptional. They work hard in lessons. They follow adult instructions promptly and effectively. Their positive attitude contributes greatly to their successful learning. Pupils collaborate well with one another. This starts in the early years, where children learn about the importance of sharing, working together and supporting each other. The school forms strong partnerships with parents and carers. This joint working encourages pupils to attend each day. This results in high attendance for all.

The school is extremely ambitious for all pupils to become well-rounded citizens who are fully prepared for life beyond the school. The programme in place for pupils' personal, social, health and economic education covers aspects such as physical and mental health. The school has strong systems in place to support pupils when they experience anxiety, worry or friendship issues. This helps pupils to feel overwhelmingly safe.

Trustees and members of the local governing body are committed to the school. They understand their role and responsibilities. They are equally passionate about giving every pupil and member of staff the opportunity to be the best that they can be. Staff are incredibly positive about the support that they receive from leaders with regards to their workload and well-being.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	139377
Local authority	Cheshire West and Chester
Inspection number	10348281
Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy free school
Age range of pupils	4 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	176
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Nayland Southorn
CEO of the trust	Stephen Docking OBE
Headteacher	Wenda Smith
Website	smartinsacademychester.co.uk
Dates of previous inspection	19 and 20 May 2015, under section 5 of the Education Act, 2005

Information about this school

- St Martin's Academy Chester is a free school and is part of the North West Academies Trust.
- The school provides a before- and after-school club for pupils.
- The school does not make use of any alternative provision for pupils.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. During a graded inspection, we grade the school for each of our key judgements (quality of education; behaviour and attitudes; personal development; and leadership and management) and for any relevant provision judgement (early years and/or sixth form provision). Schools receiving a graded inspection from September 2024, will not be given an overall effectiveness grade.

- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school’s educational provision.
- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. The inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and has taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- The inspectors met with the CEO and trustees. They also met with the headteacher, other school leaders and members of staff.
- The lead inspector met with representatives of the local governing body, including the chair of the governing body. She also spoke with a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics and physical education. For each deep dive, they held discussions about the curriculum, visited a sample of lessons, spoke with teachers, spoke with some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils’ work.
- The lead inspector observed pupils from Years 1 to 3 read to a familiar adult.
- Inspectors discussed the curriculum in some other curriculum subjects. They spoke with leaders and pupils. Inspectors reviewed samples of pupils’ work in these curriculum areas.
- Inspectors observed pupils’ behaviour during lessons and around school.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils’ interests first.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of documents, including records of meetings held by trustees and the local governing body, leaders’ evaluation of the school’s strengths and areas for improvement and documents relating to pupils’ behaviour and attendance.
- Inspectors spoke with groups of pupils about their experiences at school. They considered the views of pupils shared through Ofsted’s online survey for pupils.
- Inspectors spoke with staff about their workload and well-being. They also considered the responses to Ofsted’s online survey for staff.
- Inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted Parent View, including the free-text comments. They also spoke with some parents during the inspection.

Inspection team

Sue Dymond, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Mark Ward

Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
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