

St Martin's School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118394
Local Authority	Kent
Inspection number	291122
Inspection dates	3–4 May 2007
Reporting inspector	Selwyn Ward

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	245
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	David Carey
Headteacher	Krystyna Creek
Date of previous school inspection	4 March 2002
School address	Markland Road Dover CT17 9LY
Telephone number	01304 206620
Fax number	01304 242626

Age group	4–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This larger than average school mainly teaches pupils in mixed-age classes. About a third of the pupils have learning difficulties, which is an above average proportion. The school provides extended services through an after-school club.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 4

St Martin's has been badly hit by staffing problems. These caused much disruption to pupils' learning last year. As a result, standards were low and there has been very significant underachievement. Results in mathematics in 2006 were especially poor. Though the picture is an improving one, the school is not yet providing an adequate education for its pupils. Standards remain low and achievement, though better than in 2006, is still not as good as it should be for a significant number of pupils. Low-attaining pupils, in particular, do not make the progress they should because the school has not identified pupils' individual learning needs early enough. Many of the pupils with learning difficulties, for example, have only recently had their needs identified. It is this that makes care, guidance and support inadequate, despite good provision for pupils' pastoral care and well-being.

Pupils' personal development is good. Pupils behave well and they are increasingly keen to learn. Parents particularly value that this is a happy school where their children feel safe. As one put it, 'My children are happy here, which is a weight off my mind'. It is a tribute to the school that it has maintained the confidence of parents despite the disruption to staffing. Parents have noticed the recent improvement. One told inspectors that she was 'very pleased with my child's progress this year', but another tellingly commented that their daughter 'has had some difficulties with her sums and a little more help for her would be welcome'. Parents praise the arrangements to help children to quickly settle in when they start in the Reception Year. From a below average start, children make satisfactory progress in this Foundation Stage of their education, although standards remain below average by the start of Year 1.

Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Many lessons move at a reasonable pace, although teachers do not always expect enough of pupils so that sometimes too long is allowed for some tasks and pupils do not get as much done as they can. Most marking gives pupils a helpful indication of how to improve but the targets that pupils have for improvement are very new. They are not tailored to individual need and some pupils do not know what their targets are. A satisfactory curriculum gives appropriate emphasis to the need to raise standards in literacy and numeracy without neglecting other subjects. It is enhanced through a good range of out-of-school clubs that are much appreciated by the pupils.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The problems and uncertainties caused through extended staff illness have meant that the headteacher and school leaders have felt pressured to focus on day-to-day management issues at the expense of longer-term planning. Many of the initiatives introduced to raise standards and the school's new management structure are very recent and have not had time to have had a significant impact. Monitoring has sometimes focused on features of teaching rather than pupils' learning and progress. This has contributed to the school having an overly favourable view of how well it is doing. Nonetheless, the improvement this year in teaching and the better progress being made by many pupils show the school's sound capacity to move forward.

In accordance with section 13(3) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement, because it is performing significantly less well than in all the circumstances it could reasonably be expected to perform. The school is therefore given a Notice to Improve. Significant improvement is required in relation to the standards and achievement of the pupils and the academic guidance provided for them.

What the school should do to improve further

- ensure that pupils' individual needs are quickly identified and that all pupils know what they need to do to do better
- raise teachers' expectations of the amount of work that pupils can do in lessons
- focus the monitoring of school leaders and subject teams on evaluating the impact of teaching and other provision on pupils' learning and on the progress that pupils make in lessons and over time.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 4

Children join the school with skills and abilities that are generally below average, particularly in language. They make satisfactory progress in their Reception Year, although standards at the start of Year 1 remain below those expected for pupils' ages. Standards have fallen in recent years. They were very low in both the Year 2 and Year 6 tests in 2006. In writing, pupils at the end of Year 2 were the equivalent of a year behind pupils nationally. Achievement in the Year 6 tests in 2006 was poor. The disruption to teaching caused through staff absences resulted in widespread underachievement, with exceptionally poor achievement in mathematics. Standards and achievement have risen this year but both are still too low. More pupils are now making the progress expected but there is still a significant number who are not making enough progress over time. These include some of the least able pupils whose additional learning needs have only belatedly been recognised.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is good. From the start of the Reception Year, children quickly learn and settle into orderly routines. Pupils like their school and are fond of their teachers because 'they make us laugh'. As a result, pupils behave well and are eager to please. They say that bullying is rare and that, if it does occur, it is quickly 'sorted'. Parents tell a similar story. Pupils feel safe because they are confident that there is always an adult they can go to if they have a problem. They also learn how to keep safe, for example through lessons on road safety. Pupils learn about and appreciate the need for regular exercise and a healthy diet, although this does not stop some from slipping the odd packet of crisps into their lunchbox. They play an active role in the school community, for example, as school councillors and, for some older pupils, in interviewing prospective new teachers. Responsibilities such as these, and helping to organise events such as the school disco, help prepare pupils for their future, although low basic literacy and numeracy skills serve them less well.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Staff have good relationships with pupils and run happy classrooms where pupils enjoy their work. Teachers generally match work appropriately to pupils' capabilities. Staff manage pupils well. As a result, pupils behave well and often try hard. They usually listen carefully to their teachers' explanations, but some pupils can be rather chatty when working on their own. This

can affect the amount of work that they produce. Some teachers do not expect enough of their pupils because they allow too much time for mundane tasks and so the pace of learning slows. Occasionally, teachers do not secure all pupils' attention when individual pupils are discussing learning together. Where this happens, some pupils miss important points that arise. Teaching assistants are deployed effectively with groups of pupils.

Marking offers helpful guidance to pupils. However, staff do not always ensure that pupils follow up the written comments made. Lesson planning is satisfactory. Pupils are usually told what they are expected to learn but the use of success criteria is variable. This means that pupils are not always actively involved in assessing how well they have understood or achieved.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The continuing review of the curriculum, linking some subjects together around themes, is resulting in pupils' greater interest in their work. It is also enhancing their understanding and the purpose of their learning. There is a satisfactory balance of subjects. The school's plans to ensure progression in learning through mixed-age classes are well thought through. Once identified, the provision for pupils with learning difficulties is broadly satisfactory, but the school has not always identified and provided for these pupils quickly enough. Good use is made of visits to local places of historical and environmental interest, such as to Dover Castle, to bring pupils' learning to life. Pupils learn from the many visitors to the school, such as the police and coastguard, who contribute to pupils' safety. There is a good range of extra-curricular activities.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 4

Whilst the pastoral side of the school's work is good, procedures to track pupils' progress precisely are at a very early stage of development. A third of those with learning difficulties were only identified in January 2007 and so there are many pupils who have not benefited from the help they need. Systems to monitor pupils' rates of progress and the impact of intervention programmes for these pupils and others who have underachieved are too new to have the impact in raising attainment that school leaders would want. Pupils have targets but they do not all know what these are because these are generalised whole-class targets rather than personalised guidance on what the individual child needs to focus on to do better.

Staff's good relationships with the pupils ensure that children feel safe. Well-organised procedures to check on absences contribute to above average rates of attendance. Very good arrangements are in place for child protection and the pupils' health and safety, and there are appropriate links with external agencies to support pupils who have emotional or specific learning difficulties. The good links with secondary schools ensure a smooth transfer to the next stage of education.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Working in difficult circumstances, the headteacher and school leaders have had notable success in establishing at St Martin's a climate for learning where pupils enjoy school and want to learn. The school's serious staffing difficulties have, however, taken their toll on the school's

effectiveness over the past two years. Coping with the disruption and uncertainties caused by several prolonged staff absences has been a distraction from the need to focus on raising standards. The headteacher and senior leaders have recently taken on the subject leadership of mathematics and English in an attempt to reverse the decline in standards, and there are early signs of recent improvement in pupils' achievement.

Reorganisation of responsibilities has included the creation of newly-formed teams for linked subject areas. New responsibilities have been assigned for science and provision for pupils with learning difficulties. However, these have not yet had time to impact on provision. Similarly, although the work of the new senior leadership team has a clear focus to improve standards and determine strategy, it is only at a very early stage of development.

Governance is satisfactory. It is much improved and more involved in the school's work than hitherto because of the good leadership of the chair. It has a good committee structure with adequate terms of reference. Governors contribute to the school improvement plan and monitor its progress regularly.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Annex A

Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	4
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	3
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	4
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	4
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	4

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The behaviour of learners	2
The attendance of learners	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	4

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	4
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	4
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	4
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	Yes

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

7 May 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Martin's School, Dover, Kent CT17 9LY

Thank you all for making us so welcome and helping us when we visited your school.

The school is already changing for the better but it is not doing enough to make sure that you all do as well as you should. We are asking the staff and governors to make some more improvements and we are recommending that the school gets some extra help over the next year.

Here are the main things that we think are best about your school:

- this is a happy school where you feel safe and are keen to learn
- the changes made by your headteacher and staff have already helped to improve the school
- you are well looked after
- more of you who need extra help are now getting it and you are beginning to do better as a result
- you enjoy the good range of clubs on offer.

These are the main things that we have asked the school to do better:

- those of you who need extra help should get it more quickly, and all of you should have targets that help you to do better
- some of you could be getting through more work in some lessons
- we would like staff to keep a close check on how well you all do in lessons and over your time in school.

You can help too by making sure you know your targets and continuing to work hard and do your best.

Thank you again for being so helpful and friendly when we came to see you.

Yours faithfully Selwyn Ward Lead Inspector