

St Martin's Church of England Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	104369
Local Authority	Wolverhampton
Inspection number	308582
Inspection dates	2–3 October 2007
Reporting inspector	David Carrington

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	177
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Wendy Collymore
Headteacher	Lynne Law
Date of previous school inspection	1 December 2003
School address	Wallace Road Bradley Bilston WV14 8BS
Telephone number	01902 558966
Fax number	01902 550794

Age group	3–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

St Martin's CE Primary School serves the south east corner of Bilston. There is considerable economic and social hardship in the area. The school is smaller than most other primary schools. The pupils are mainly from White British families. Not many pupils speak English as an additional language. More pupils have learning difficulties and/or disabilities than is usually found. There is a Children's Centre in school that caters for children from birth to four years old. When pupils start in Reception they have well below average skills and knowledge.

There have been many staff changes during the last two years.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

St Martin's CE Primary School provides a satisfactory quality of education, but it has a number of strengths and is improving steadily. Although the school has experienced a number of setbacks since it was inspected last time, it is now poised for better things. Pupils are benefiting from improved teaching that is becoming consistently good across the school. They are learning more in less time and standards are rising. The good improvement in recent years is the result of talented leadership and management. The headteacher is insistent on high expectations amongst staff and pupils and leads the school with great success.

Parents and pupils recognise just how much the school has improved. Parents are one hundred percent behind the school and they appreciate what it is doing to help their children succeed. The pupils enjoy coming to school and they work hard for their teachers. They do not want to lose a minute of their learning. They also have a store of good ideas to help the school improve even more. School leaders take these ideas seriously and have put many into place.

As in the years before, the results in Year 6 last summer were not high enough. Standards were well below average and the pupils had not made consistent gains in their learning as they passed through Years 3 to 6. The weaknesses in achievement were largely because of staffing difficulties, as many teachers did not stay long in the school. Now, the staff team is stable and this is helping to give the pupils a more reliable quality of education. Teaching is satisfactory but is improving well. The school has not yet reached its target for the total amount of good teaching because there are several teachers who are fairly new to the profession. However, they are providing the necessary secure education for the pupils. The evidence for improvement can be seen in the Foundation Stage and Year 2. Here, good teaching is enabling the children to spurt ahead with their learning. The overall rate of progress through the school is now satisfactory.

Behaviour is good and is better than it was a few years ago. Pupils are keen to learn and are proud of their achievements. They enjoy their school life and are becoming increasingly self-reliant. The pupils are notable for their politeness, cheerfulness and friendliness. The school has considerable success in encouraging pupils' good spiritual, moral and social development. Their awareness of the wealth and diversity of different cultures is less well developed.

Pupils' good personal development is a result of effective pastoral guidance. Vulnerable pupils are looked after very carefully and all pupils are safeguarded thoroughly. Academic guidance has been improved enormously and is good. The pupils' 'Target Folders' are used as a constant source of encouragement for them to make good progress. They know their targets, the levels they are working at, and what they have to do to improve.

Good improvements in literacy and numeracy have led to better progress by the pupils, enhanced by the quality of work in information and communication technology (ICT). However, senior leaders recognise that the curriculum is not yet rich and varied enough to fully engage and challenge all pupils, particularly those who are more able. Pupils' life chances are increased by the close partnership with community workers, the sports college and the Children's Centre.

St Martin's is moving ahead with confidence because it is well led. Governors are influential because they have a good understanding of the school's performance. Senior leaders have quickly established themselves as a force for positive change. The school sets ambitious targets for pupils' achievement and is more successful now in meeting them. School leaders and the governors make accurate and realistic judgements of the school's work. There is good capacity to build on the successes already in place.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children get off to a good start in the Foundation Stage. Their good progress is assisted by the opportunities many of them have to explore new things during their time in the Children's Centre. Provision for pre-school children is good and they move on from their low starting base of skills and knowledge. Children in the Nursery settle quickly and enjoy the well-judged blend of independent investigation and adult led work. In Reception the good progress continues. The quality of teaching is good and by the time the children join Year 1 they have reached broadly average standards, although their literacy skills are rather less well developed than those in the other five areas of learning. The Foundation Stage is very well resourced and the accommodation is excellent. It is well led and managed.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that the school's target for good teaching is met fully.
- Broaden and enrich the curriculum to ensure that all pupils, especially the more able, develop essential skills and knowledge in a wider variety of situations.
- Strengthen pupils' understanding and enjoyment of the diverse cultural traditions across the country.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next Section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Pupils make satisfactory progress in Year 6 although current standards remain below the national average. This represents an improvement on previous years when standards were much lower and progress was erratic. The staffing difficulties that were at the root of pupils' weak performance have been eliminated and progress is accelerating in Years 3 to 6. Standards are rising as well. They are average in Year 3 and not far short of this level in Years 4 and 5. There is not yet enough challenge for the more able but their progress is accelerating due to the overall improvement in the quality of teaching and learning.

Standards rise from well below average when children start in the Foundation Stage to average when they leave Year 2. Progress is good during this period because the work is carefully planned to enable pupils to take small steps in learning in a logical sequence. The literacy scheme used in school is a good example of this approach and pupils thoroughly enjoy helping each other to build the vital skills of reading. Success in reading is especially necessary because children's literacy skills are not as well developed as they are in other areas of work by the time they leave Reception. Despite this, standards are average overall at this point.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils enjoy their time at St Martin's and this is reflected in their attendance, which has improved well to average levels. There is much shared enthusiasm amongst the pupils and they are proud of each other's achievements. They show respect for each other and for the staff. The personal, social and emotional development of children in the Foundation Stage is good and they become

happy learners who work together well. Pupils' awareness of life in our ethnically diverse society is satisfactory but it is not as well rounded as their spiritual, moral and social development.

School meals have been improved to allow pupils to make healthier eating choices. The uptake of meals has risen, which is a firm indicator of the pupils' good awareness of health issues. They are also well alert to safety needs and watch out for each other.

Pupils' basic skills are being improved well, and already provide them with a sound preparation for life beyond school. They also develop useful skills of independence, collaboration and team playing that will serve them well in the future.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

In the Foundation Stage, the mix of adult led and independent activities suits the children well. Staff build effectively on the children's inquisitive interest. Children in the Children's Centre and the Nursery are constantly amazed by the many attractive things put before them. Children in Reception settle well to their learning because of the close attention given to their needs.

Teaching in Years 1 and 2 is now impacting well on pupils' progress. The commercial literacy scheme is particularly well taught. Here, the teaching assistants play a key role and pupils benefit from their close attention. As in older years, work for the more able is not sufficiently challenging to ensure enough pupils reach the higher levels in the national tests.

In Years 3 to 6 teaching is satisfactory, which is an improvement on its previous quality. The frequent staff changes of the past have now been halted and this has enabled senior leaders to focus on the long-term consistency of teaching rather than on solving difficulties and weaknesses as a matter of routine. There is some good teaching in the final four years of school, indeed a little is outstanding. However, the school has not yet reached its target of over two thirds good or better teaching. This is due largely to the number of new teachers. They are building experience and improving their practice successfully. All staff are committed to improvement and are working hard to accomplish better provision for the pupils. There is already greater pace to work, more challenge for pupils and higher expectations of what can be achieved.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum is satisfactory and has a strong focus on literacy and numeracy. The practical activities and investigations are particularly popular amongst the pupils and these help them build skills and knowledge more effectively. There are some links between subjects, especially in ICT work, but senior leaders accept that the contact between subjects and the challenge for the more able are relatively weak areas. The curriculum serves pupils' personal, social and health education well. The programme of out-of-school activities benefits pupils' achievement, especially in sport. The curriculum for children in the Foundation Stage is well founded and provides ample opportunities for them to investigate and experiment under a watchful eye.

Provision in the Children's Centre is well focused on the needs of these very young children. It is assisted by the very good resources and careful planning that enable the children to take the very small steps necessary to help them grow as confident explorers.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Watchfulness is at the centre of the school's work to care for the pupils. The adults in school are alert to their needs and provide good guidance to help pupils learn and make progress. In this, the teaching assistants, learning support mentor and site manager all play crucially effective roles. The school has good systems to check the adults working with the pupils and for child protection. The pupils support each other and value the 'buddy' and 'friendship stop' systems that ensure everyone is part of the school.

Pupils are given good academic guidance based on the well-used 'Target Folders'. Pupils were observed referring to these in a science session in order to polish their speaking and listening skills. Whilst most teachers ensure that work is marked with comments about pupils' levels and targets, this is not fully consistent, although school leaders are monitoring the situation carefully.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

St Martin's impresses the visitor with its sense of purpose and the enjoyment of school life. The major improvements, including improvements in teaching now result in achievement being satisfactory although standards are still below average. This is a direct result of the good leadership and management in school. There are effective systems to check and evaluate the quality of provision and to set targets and track that pupils are on course to meet them. Much work has gone into sharpening these systems so that senior leaders and the governors have an accurate and realistic view of the school's work.

Senior leaders and the governors take their responsibilities for the pupils' achievement very seriously. They work well as a team and join the headteacher in her quest for improvement with enthusiasm and determination. The headteacher sets a very good example for her staff and pupils and constantly seeks to improve what the school and pupils do.

The Foundation Stage is well managed, and this has resulted in its development as a strength of the school. There has been good leadership and management of the Children's Centre. This has developed into an asset of the school in a very short period. It is enabling the children to build steadily from their well below average starting points. Whilst there are concrete plans to improve subject management, its quality is not yet consistent because some staff are very new to teaching or to the school.

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

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	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?	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3

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 extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	3
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?	2

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?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
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?	No

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

8 October 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Martin's CE Primary School, Bilston, WV14 8BS

We enjoyed our two days spent with you earlier this month and want to thank you for helping us so much. We discovered that there are many good things for you to do in school. We know that you enjoy school and that your parents are pleased you come to St Martin's. These are the main things we found:

- You are given a satisfactory education and it is getting even better.
- Your progress is faster than in the past and the standard of your work is rising.
- You know your targets and work hard to reach them.
- You have more good lessons than in the past.
- Children in the Children's Centre enjoy discovering about new things.
- You are well behaved, polite and kind.
- Your teachers and all the other adults look after you carefully.
- Your headteacher leads the school really well and other staff help her check everything is running smoothly.

To help the school get even better there are three things it can do.

- Make sure that you have even more good lessons.
- Introduce new things for you to study that challenge everyone.
- Show you more about the fascinating lives of different people in this country.

You can support your teachers in making these improvements by continuing to work cheerfully and productively.

Yours faithfully

David Carrington Lead inspector

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