

St Martin's CofE Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	114539
Local Authority	Brighton and Hove
Inspection number	311639
Inspection dates	12–13 November 2008
Reporting inspector	Martin Kerly

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

The registered childcare, managed by the governing body, was inspected under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	174
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS	51
Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years	0
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Boumont Brandie
Headteacher	Martin Thorn
Date of previous school inspection	7 March 2005
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Hartington Road Brighton BN2 3LJ
Telephone number	01273 707114
Fax number	01273 230774

Age group	3–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The school is a smaller than average. The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) is comprised of a Nursery class for three-year-olds who attend either mornings or afternoons and a Reception class. The very large majority of pupils are White British and nearly all speak English as their first language. The proportions of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those with a statement of special educational need are greater than normally found. There have been several changes of headteacher and deputy headteacher over the last 18 months. The current acting headteacher took up post in September 2008 for the academic year. The current acting deputy headteacher also took up post in September 2008 and has since been appointed permanent deputy headteacher from January 2009. Around half the class teachers have joined the school during 2008, including the coordinators of English and mathematics.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

This is a satisfactory school. Whilst it has a number of strengths, there are several important aspects in need of improvement. Considerable changes and uncertainties within the leadership team have understandably interrupted the school's development. However, the new and very experienced acting headteacher and the new deputy headteacher have re-established a sense of clarity of direction. They have quickly gained an accurate view of the school's performance and priorities for improvement and are working effectively with staff and governors to raise achievement and the quality of provision to levels previously attained. The school is already improving and is securely placed to improve further.

The achievement of pupils is satisfactory. Standards are improving after a previous decline. This improvement is most evident in Year 6. Overall standards are a little below average, particularly in writing and mathematics. In these subjects, pupils' progress is inconsistent and relatively few pupils attain standards higher than expected for their age. Standards in science are higher than in other subjects with many pupils making good progress. Although there is some good teaching, teaching is satisfactory rather than good because there are inconsistencies in the way policies are implemented. Teachers do not always show high enough expectations of pupils and are not making the best use of assessments to ensure work is matched to pupils' different needs. Pupils respond very positively to practical activities and enriching events. In other lessons in several classes, a small proportion frequently become disengaged, slowing their progress. The curriculum is satisfactory. However, the school has just begun to develop more imaginative links between subjects, providing opportunities for pupils to work creatively in small groups, and to extend the more able, but this is not developed across the school.

Pupils' personal development and well-being are good. The good progress in personal development in the EYFS is maintained by older pupils. The school cares for all pupils well. This is appreciated by almost all parents. One reflected other views by commenting, 'My son feels very safe and well cared for.' The school provides very good support for vulnerable pupils and those with problems but the overall care, guidance and support are satisfactory because not all pupils receive sufficient academic guidance to extend their learning. Assessment information is more accessible to teachers as a result of recent improvements but it is not used effectively enough in some cases when setting targets for pupils, channelling support for specific groups or checking what difference the help has made.

The acting headteacher has introduced a number of effective procedures to strengthen the currently satisfactory leadership and management. He is addressing the over-generous views within the school about how well it is doing, has ensured assessment information is readily available to teachers and begun to raise expectations of what the pupils can achieve. He has extended the leadership team to involve the new phase leaders who, together with the new core subject leaders, are welcoming greater responsibility. At this early stage their precise roles are not clear and some require additional training to enable them to carry out rigorous checks on the school's performance.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 3

Children in the EYFS are well cared for. Parents are pleased by the way their children settle quickly and how happy they are. The children's overall attainment on entry to the school is a

little below expectations for their age, with speech and language skills being lower than national expectations for a significant proportion of pupils. Children make satisfactory progress in most areas of learning and good progress in personal and social skills and physical development where most attain the levels expected for their age. Children are keen to please their teachers and respond well to the warm relationships and lots of praise received. There is some good teaching but teaching and learning are satisfactory because expectations are not consistently high enough and this tends to slow progress. The introduction to reading and writing skills is too cautious and this contributes to very few children attaining the goals expected in these aspects by the end of the EYFS. In all other ways the curriculum is good. There is a secure and stimulating environment in and out of doors that promotes all six areas of learning, offering a wide range of experiences. The very new canopy has increased the opportunities for children to learn through independent play outdoors. Leadership is satisfactory but there are some missed opportunities to assess children's learning which negatively affect smooth transition arrangements within the EYFS and on to Year 1.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve teaching by ensuring teachers demonstrate consistently high expectations of pupils and match work carefully to the needs of different pupils in order to accelerate progress, especially in writing and mathematics.
- Clarify and develop the roles of the extended leadership team with training to enable leaders to carry out rigorous and systematic checks on the school's performance.
- Make better use of the improved assessment information when guiding pupils about their next steps in learning and when arranging or reviewing additional support for specific groups of pupils.
- Strengthen the curriculum by making more links between subjects, increasing the opportunities for investigative and collaborative work and adapting it to reflect the needs of the more able.

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' achievement and progress are satisfactory overall but standards attained by pupils are frequently a little below national averages for their age. This is most noticeable in writing and mathematics. In part, this is a reflection of the relatively low starting points of some pupils on entry to the school, especially in writing. However, it also reflects slow progress by some pupils in previous years, particularly where they had up to five different teachers in one year. Last year standards in mathematics rose following a previous decline but at the same time writing declined with standards of spelling and punctuation being below average. Too few pupils are making good progress in writing, and very few are exceeding national expectations in writing or mathematics. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make satisfactory progress and some learn well during periods of additional support from teaching assistants. Progress by pupils of all abilities is accelerating this term, especially in Years 5 and 6. This has enabled previously modest end of year targets to be revised upwards, helping to raise expectations and promote faster progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Pupils learn to behave well. A small minority struggle to demonstrate appropriate behaviour and attitudes to fellow pupils but the overwhelming majority of pupils and parents recognise that the school manages the occasional incidents of challenging behaviour well. This helps pupils enjoy school a lot, a view reported unanimously by parents. One reflected many similar comments by writing, 'My child loves school and would come at week-ends if she could.' Pupils have a good understanding of the importance of healthy lifestyles, such as diet, and know how to keep themselves safe. The school has Healthy School and Activemark awards in recognition of its good work in this aspect. Many pupils contribute to the school and wider community by, for example, conscientiously performing jobs around school including recycling rubbish, and contributing to local charity events. Attendance has improved in response to good work by the school and attendance rates are marginally above average. By the time they leave pupils have gained a satisfactory level of key skills needed for secondary education and adult life, including the use of computers.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Frequent changes of teachers and leaders have hampered the drive to promote high quality teaching across the school. There are examples of good teaching and learning but too much is satisfactory rather than good and school policies, such as the approach to marking pupils' work, are not implemented consistently. Most teachers manage behaviour well and establish a positive learning atmosphere in lessons. They ensure the classrooms are full of interesting displays to stimulate pupils' interest and self-esteem. Learning is good in those lessons where pupils are highly motivated by the task, such as in Year 6 when working in pairs on poetry in preparation for using video to help evaluate each other's work. Whilst teachers regularly plan lessons with different activities designed to reflect pupils' needs, teachers' expectations are sometimes too low with the work not matched closely enough to pupils' abilities. This results in slow learning, more able pupils not being fully challenged and some pupils becoming disengaged. A few teachers tend to rely too much on pupils to volunteer ideas, allowing others to remain passive. This restricts learning and misses opportunities to strengthen pupils' speaking and listening skills.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum is broad. Planning covers the required range of subjects but does not systematically develop links between subjects or sufficiently ensure a planned progression of key skills. The school is piloting ways to develop skills with pupils working in small groups on practical and investigative tasks in Year 5 and from time to time across the school. There are good enrichment opportunities and pupils thrive on special events and visits to extend their experiences. An example of this was seen following a visit to Fishbourne Roman Palace, when pupils worked very enthusiastically in small groups to produce 'Roman' meals using skills from many aspects of the curriculum. The curriculum includes good activities and materials to promote personal development and those who are learning English as an additional language are helped effectively. The curriculum is adapted well to meet the needs of pupils with learning difficulties

and/or disabilities but progress has been limited in adapting it to fully extend and reflect the needs of the gifted and talented.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

The care and support for all pupils is good and is frequently exemplary for specific pupils who experience particular problems and those who are more vulnerable. This enables these pupils to be fully included and involves close working partnerships with their families and other external professionals. The academic guidance for pupils, whilst satisfactory and developing, is not as strong as the other elements, being too often inconsistently applied. There has not been sufficient time for new practices to have a significant impact. Most pupils are becoming aware of their short-term learning targets but the targets are not always clear or specific enough and pupils are not confident when talking about what they need to do to improve. In too many classes, pupils do not get enough regular and clear feedback from teachers about how to improve their work. Procedures designed to safeguard pupils are implemented rigorously and are effective.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The governors have worked with commitment and determination to maintain stability, an appropriate staffing structure and minimal disruption caused by frequent staff alterations. They fulfil their roles well. Nevertheless, a combination of frequent staff changes at all levels and a lack of rigorous checks during this time resulted in the school making over-generous judgements about its performance. This contributed to a decline in the overall quality of provision and subsequently in pupils' progress. The acting headteacher quickly recognised this as well as the need for the mainly new senior staff to identify the priorities and become more involved and skilled in addressing them. Leaders are responding positively to their new opportunities and are welcoming training to help them implement the new and very well structured short-term plan designed to raise achievement. The recently established phase teams are a good first step in helping reduce inconsistency of practice between classes and are already showing signs of making a difference. The two senior leaders are establishing better ways to track the performance of pupils and improve how this information is shared with staff. However, at this early stage, the information is not being used to full advantage across the school when planning work, determining which pupils need additional help or the effect of previous help. Throughout the period of staff changes, the school has continued to make a satisfactory contribution to the community.

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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 capacity to make any necessary improvements	3

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	3
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	3
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	2
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	3
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	2
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	3

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/or disabilities make progress	3

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are 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
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	2
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 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?	3

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	3
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	3
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	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

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

21 November 2008

Dear Pupils Inspection of St Martin's Church of England Primary School, Brighton BN2 3LJ

- Thank you for making us feel so welcome when we recently visited your school. We enjoyed talking with you and seeing some of your work. You told us you enjoy your time in school and your parents agree. Yours is a satisfactory school. There are several things that are good and others that are improving. Here are some of the highlights we found:
- You know how important it is to eat healthily and do lots of exercise. That is why your school has got special Healthy School and Activemark awards.
- Nearly all of you make progress in your lessons, although often faster in science than in the literacy and numeracy sessions. Some of you find writing difficult and need more help with spelling, punctuation and with your mathematics.
- Teachers carefully plan lessons and try to make them interesting. You really enjoy special events and things like making 'Roman' meals after visiting Fishbourne Roman Palace.
- Everyone who works in the school takes good care of you. They are especially good at looking after you when you have particular problems or worries.
- Your new headteacher has a clear idea of how to make the school even better.
- The governors have worked hard to find new teachers and leaders during a period when there have been many changes.
- Even though the school is improving, we have asked the headteacher, staff and governors to work together on four things to make it even better:
- Ensure teachers give you work that is always just right for each group, being not too easy or too difficult, especially with writing and mathematics, as this will help you make faster progress.
- Find more ways of helping the new leaders carry out their important checks on how well things are going around the school.
- Help teachers use all the information they have when deciding how to divide you into groups or when thinking of ways to explain to you what you need to do to improve, for example when setting targets and marking your work.
- Develop even more interesting things for you to learn about by finding ways to link work in different subjects and setting you interesting problems to solve.

We are sure you will want to do all you can to help the school continue to improve.

Yours sincerely

Martin Kerly, Lead Inspector