

St Martin's School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118394
Local Authority	Kent
Inspection number	319490
Inspection dates	1–2 July 2008
Reporting inspector	Carole Skinner

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	247
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	David Carey
Headteacher	Krystyna Creek
Date of previous school inspection	1 May 2007
School address	Markland Road Dover CT17 9LY
Telephone number	01304 206620
Fax number	01304 242626

Age group	4–11
Inspection dates	1–2 July 2008
Inspection number	319490

© Crown copyright 2008

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The school is larger than average. Of the nine classes, five cater for pupils in two different year groups. Approximately a third of the pupils have learning difficulties, which is a higher than average proportion. Since it was given a Notice to Improve in May 2007, the school has been participating in the local authority's Intensifying Support Programme.

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 provides its pupils with a satisfactory standard of education. It is a rapidly improving school. In accordance with section 13 (5) of the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that the school no longer requires significant improvement. Strong and purposeful leadership has successfully steered the school through stormy waters in the past few years, when serious disruptions to staffing led to widespread underachievement. The school has made great headway over the past 14 months and has established a strong staff team with a shared commitment to raising standards and accelerating pupils' progress. As a result, pupils' achievement is now satisfactory. Standards are close to the national average in mathematics and reading, but are lower in writing and science.

There are two key areas where improvements have had a significant impact. The development of rigorous systems for monitoring pupils' progress during each year has provided teachers and senior managers with an effective early warning system that flags up pupils who are not making expected progress. This leads to prompt action to identify and address the reasons for the slower progress. Part and parcel of this are the much improved procedures for identifying and supporting pupils with learning or behavioural difficulties. These ensure that support is tailored more closely to pupils' specific needs so that they make at least satisfactory progress.

Teaching and learning are rapidly improving in response to good professional development opportunities for all staff. Although the overall quality of teaching is satisfactory, there is a significantly higher proportion of good teaching than there was a year ago. Teachers now have higher expectations of pupils. Sharing good practice has led to improvements in the pace of learning in most lessons. In many lessons, teachers plan tasks that provide suitable levels of challenge for pupils at different stages of learning but this is not yet consistent, especially for the more able pupils. Plans are progressing very effectively to enhance and diversify what is currently a satisfactory curriculum by making increasingly creative links between subjects. There are, however, still too few opportunities for pupils to use and extend their writing skills through their work in other subjects.

The school's greatest strength lies in the high quality care and support it provides for pupils' personal development. Adults encourage pupils to do their best and take great care to ensure that they feel safe and secure. An outstanding feature is pupils' enjoyment of all that the school offers. Pupils' attitudes to learning and their behaviour in lessons are often exemplary. A few pupils say that playground behaviour is sometimes too boisterous but most feel that teachers deal with these incidents well. Pupils grow in confidence and become increasingly independent, contributing much to the daily life of the school. Academic guidance for pupils is satisfactory. Teachers' marking and pupils' targets do not always give pupils a clear understanding of the next steps in their learning but this is improving in response to strong leadership.

Senior managers have played a pivotal role in implementing and monitoring the impact of new initiatives. The whole staff team has pulled together to improve the quality of education for the pupils. The full impact of this work has yet to be seen in the pupils' achievements, but the school is well equipped to make even greater strides in the future.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 3

Staff changes have temporarily interrupted the development of the Foundation Stage, but these have been managed well to minimise the impact on children's learning. The school has now appointed a specialist early years teacher to lead the development of the Foundation Stage curriculum from September 2008. Children's skills on entry to the Reception class vary considerably from year to year, but are usually lower than those expected for their age. The current year group was closer to expectations but still had relatively weak language and communication skills. Children make good progress in reading and mathematical development. Progress in writing is slower, particularly for the more able children, because they have too few opportunities to write independently. Overall, standards are similar to the national average by the end of the year. In previous years, assessments have been unreliable but leadership and management have supported staff well to ensure greater accuracy. There are some good opportunities for children to learn through play, but sometimes all children do the same activities regardless of their capabilities. Adults take very good care of the children and help them to feel secure so that they thoroughly enjoy being at school.

What the school should do to improve further

- Accelerate pupils' progress, particularly in writing and science, to ensure good achievement for all.
- Match planned activities more closely to the needs of different groups of pupils, particularly the more able.
- Ensure that teachers' marking and the targets teachers set for pupils give them a better understanding of how to improve and reach the next stage in learning.

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

Standards are rapidly improving as new initiatives and teaching methods begin to take effect. These have been particularly effective in reading and mathematics, less so in writing and science. The introduction of a new scheme of work and improved planning for the mixed age classes are helping pupils to make up lost ground quickly in science, but there are still gaps in older pupils' knowledge and skills. The school has recognised that weaknesses in pupils' ability to communicate their ideas verbally are inhibiting progress in writing. There is now a major whole school emphasis on developing pupils' speaking and listening skills, which is having a positive effect. This was illustrated well in a Year 4/5 lesson where pupils produced some good quality writing about their visit to the Science Museum after discussing their ideas with a partner and sharing them with the class.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils show respect for adults and are considerate towards each other. Their good behaviour and enthusiasm for learning help to create a good working atmosphere in lessons. Pupils' keen participation in a wide range of sporting activities helps to boost their physical fitness and

pupils are well aware of how to eat a healthy diet – even though the highest take up for school meals is on Friday when chips are on the menu! The school council represents pupils' opinions and makes helpful suggestions for improving aspects of school life. Pupils discuss and reflect on moral issues and the beauty of the world around them. They appreciate cultural diversity and develop a growing awareness of people who are less fortunate than they are. Fund raising for charities is often initiated by the pupils. They are eager to take on responsibilities such as play leaders and 'playground pals'. Good opportunities to work together in lessons and team building activities prepare pupils well for the next stage of their education. They are less well equipped in terms of basic language and literacy skills. Attendance has dipped this year to average levels having been good for the past two years. This is mainly due to more pupils taking holidays in term time.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The quality of teaching and learning is rapidly becoming more consistent and, in many lessons, now promotes good progress, but this is not yet consistent in every class and every subject. Good teaching in Years 1 and 2 over the past year has enabled these pupils to achieve well. Pupils enjoy learning because teachers create a warm and welcoming atmosphere in the classroom and involve them actively in practical activities that motivate and interest them. For example, pupils in Year 3/4 greatly enjoyed investigating ways to propel a 'rocket' in the playground. Inconsistencies relate to two main areas. Teachers do not yet always explain clearly enough what pupils are expected to learn at the start of the lesson or involve pupils in assessing their own progress at the end. In some lessons, tasks are not matched well enough to pupils' individual needs and abilities. Teachers do not always provide suitably challenging work for the more able pupils, for example. Clear policies and well directed guidance from the school's leaders are addressing this.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The large number of mixed-age classes has made it tricky to plan the curriculum effectively to ensure progression in learning for every pupil. Recent improvements, for example in adapting the new science curriculum, are successfully addressing this problem. Attractive displays around the school show that art is a strong area and that it contributes well to pupils' cultural development. The school is now moving rapidly towards a more creative curriculum that combines subjects within topics and themes, but it is at an early stage in this process. The use of information and communication technology (ICT) is an emerging strength, while the development of writing skills through other subjects remains a high priority for improvement. The school has rightly identified and is responding well to the need to focus more intently on improving pupils' speaking and listening skills as an aid to expressing their ideas more effectively in writing. Pupils benefit from a wide range of visits to the local area and further afield, and from the expertise and enthusiasm of a variety of visitors. Those in Years 3 to 6 thoroughly enjoyed their visit to the Science Museum in London. This led to much good work the following day in literacy and science lessons.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

High quality pastoral care and good arrangements for safeguarding pupils help to create a happy school where pupils are receptive to learning and feel secure. Significant improvements in the procedures for identifying pupils' additional needs have greatly enhanced the provision for pupils with learning difficulties. The school makes good use of its links with a number of external agencies. Pupils say they are looked after well and that teachers always listen to their concerns. Although each group of pupils has targets to reach in reading, writing and mathematics, these are not always focused sharply enough on their individual needs. They do not give pupils a clear enough idea of the next steps in their learning or how to achieve them. Teachers' marking sometimes explains how pupils can improve their work but this is not yet consistent.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Strong leadership has enabled the school to make good progress over the past year. Working closely in partnership with local authority consultants and advisers, senior staff have introduced a number of initiatives to improve teaching and learning that are already having a positive effect on raising standards. The full impact of these is yet to be seen. There are very good systems for analysing assessment data and tracking each pupil's progress from term to term towards increasingly challenging targets. This leads to prompt action to tackle early signs of underachievement. Rigorous monitoring of teaching, learning and the curriculum has identified the right priorities for improvement. Subject leadership in English, mathematics, science and ICT, recently disrupted by staff changes, is back on track and firmly focused on raising standards. The most common cause for discontent amongst parents is that their children have had too many different teachers during the year. This has actually affected only a small minority of pupils and senior managers have made every effort to minimise the impact on their learning. The governing body has also undergone many changes of personnel. Led well by an experienced chair, governors are steadily developing their role in monitoring the school's performance. Good systems are in place but they are not yet fully up and running.

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
---	----------------

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	3
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	1
The attendance of learners	3
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 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?	3

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	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?	No

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

3 July 2008

Dear Pupils

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

Thank you for your warm welcome and for talking to us about your school. We saw some good things. We were pleased to see how much you enjoy school and that you behave very well in lessons. Most of you behave well at playtimes too, but a few of you say that behaviour can be a little boisterous at times. You told us that the adults look after you well and listen to you if you are worried about anything. We like the way the play leaders and playground pals help to look after you and keep you safe.

You really enjoy lessons because they are interesting and there are lots of practical activities that help you to learn. The teachers are trying to make work even more interesting for you by linking subjects together. For example, those of you in the Year 4/5 class were doing some very interesting work to create a PowerPoint presentation about your visit to the Science Museum. Some of your voiceover scripts were taking shape very well.

At the moment your school is giving you a satisfactory education, but it is improving all the time. The adults who run the school check frequently to see how well everything is working and how you are doing. They know exactly what needs to be done to make your school even better and have good plans to achieve this. We have also suggested three things to work on.

- For the past few years, many of you have not been making enough progress. Now you are doing much better. You are making faster progress in reading and mathematics than in writing and science. We have asked the school to help you make better progress in writing and science.
- We have also asked the school to give you better information on how to improve. You have group targets in literacy and numeracy. These don't always tell you what you need to do next or how to do better. You can help by making sure you always understand what you are aiming for, and asking teachers if you don't. Some of the teachers write very helpful comments in your books to show you how to improve, but this does not happen often enough.
- Those of you who are capable of doing harder work sometimes have tasks that are too easy for you. We have asked the teachers to make your work more challenging.

With very best wishes,

Carole Skinner Lead inspector

3 July 2008

Dear Pupils



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

Thank you for your warm welcome and for talking to us about your school. We saw some good things. We were pleased to see how much you enjoy school and that you behave very well in lessons. Most of you behave well at playtimes too, but a few of you say that behaviour can be a little boisterous at times. You told us that the adults look after you well and listen to you if you are worried about anything. We like the way the play leaders and playground pals help to look after you and keep you safe.

You really enjoy lessons because they are interesting and there are lots of practical activities that help you to learn. The teachers are trying to make work even more interesting for you by linking subjects together. For example, those of you in the Year 4/5 class were doing some very interesting work to create a PowerPoint presentation about your visit to the Science Museum. Some of your voiceover scripts were taking shape very well.

At the moment your school is giving you a satisfactory education, but it is improving all the time. The adults who run the school check frequently to see how well everything is working and how you are doing. They know exactly what needs to be done to make your school even better and have good plans to achieve this. We have also suggested three things to work on.

- For the past few years, many of you have not been making enough progress. Now you are doing much better. You are making faster progress in reading and mathematics than in writing and science. We have asked the school to help you make better progress in writing and science.
- We have also asked the school to give you better information on how to improve. You have group targets in literacy and numeracy. These don't always tell you what you need to do next or how to do better. You can help by making sure you always understand what you are aiming for, and asking teachers if you don't. Some of the teachers write very helpful comments in your books to show you how to improve, but this does not happen often enough.
- Those of you who are capable of doing harder work sometimes have tasks that are too easy for you. We have asked the teachers to make your work more challenging.

With very best wishes,

Carole Skinner
Lead inspector