

Inspection of Martins Wood Primary School

Mildmay Road, Stevenage, Hertfordshire SG1 5RT

Inspection dates: 16 to 18 November 2021

Overall effectiveness

Inadequate

The quality of education

Good

Behaviour and attitudes

Requires improvement

Personal development

Good

Leadership and management

Inadequate

Early years provision

Good

Previous inspection grade

Good

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils receive a good quality of education. They enjoy coming to school and are happy in their work and play. They like the fact that teachers make learning interesting and enjoyable.

Children in early years get a good start to early education. Children's social and emotional needs are identified first and foremost, so that they are ready for learning. Parents and carers spoken with commented on how quickly their children have settled.

The most vulnerable pupils who may be at risk and require additional support do not always get the timely intervention and help that they need, including from the appropriate external agencies. Despite this significant weakness, pupils are kept safe on the school site. Most pupils spoken with say that they feel safe in school.

Pupils generally behave well in lessons. They say that bullying is rare, and they all have a named 'VIP' whom they can speak with in school and at home. However, some pupils' conduct at break- and lunchtimes falls below leaders' expectations. Some pupils feel that poorer behaviour is not always dealt with by adults in a consistent manner.

Pupils talk enthusiastically about the wide range of sporting and creative opportunities that they have in and after school.

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

Leaders and governors have not created a culture that safeguards the most vulnerable pupils or secures support from relevant external agencies in a timely way.

Beyond the weaknesses in safeguarding systems, leaders and governors lack precise oversight of the effectiveness of some vital aspects of the school's work. For example, systems for reporting, monitoring and reviewing vital aspects of the school's work, such as for behaviour and safeguarding, are not effective. Leaders do not keep precise records. As a result, leaders are not identifying issues that need rectifying quickly, such as the poorer behaviour of a minority of pupils around the school outside lesson time. There is not a shared understanding between leaders and governors about the school's most pressing priorities. Strategic planning to improve these areas is weak.

Governors rely too much on the information provided by leaders and do not challenge the information provided to them. As a result, governors do not have a clear oversight of how well pupils, including disadvantaged pupils and pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), behave, achieve or are safeguarded.

Curriculum leaders are skilled and knowledgeable. Most subject plans are clear and implemented well. Curriculum leaders have planned content so that pupils catch up on learning that has been missed due to the pandemic. In subjects such as science, mathematics and physical education, pupils learn the important knowledge they need. Teachers ensure that disadvantaged pupils and those with SEND receive an appropriate level of support. This helps pupils to successfully access and make progress through the curriculum. A small number of curriculum plans are not as well developed and do not give teachers enough clarity on what pupils need to learn. These plans focus on activities rather than the knowledge to be taught.

Early reading is taught effectively. Leaders in the pre-school, Nursery and Reception work closely to ensure that children quickly develop a love of reading. Adults make sure that children experience a wide range of stories and exposure to language. Because phonics is taught well, most children in early years are secure in their sounds by the end of Reception. Teachers make sure that pupils who fall behind get the support they need to catch up quickly.

As they get older, pupils develop their reading fluency and comprehension skills. Leaders of reading have identified why pupils, in the past, were not achieving as well as they should. They have reviewed and restructured the curriculum to engage all pupils. Pupils' work and pupils' increased confidence in reading are evident. Pupils with SEND receive precise support to help them learn to read.

Leaders offer pupils a vast array of clubs and opportunities. Leaders invest in significant resources to support pupils to attend, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Pupils embrace opportunities to take on responsibilities, including where older pupils have opportunities to work with younger pupils. Pupils report that they are pleased to have their say through the school council.

Pupils are knowledgeable and respectful about the value and importance of diversity. They engage enthusiastically in all learning about how people have different beliefs, views and experiences. For example, from the start of early years, children develop an understanding of different relationships. Pupils understand that families are represented in a variety of ways. The curriculum and school culture are well planned and thought out to help pupils to be well prepared to respect the values of others.

The vast majority of parents are happy about what the school provides. Those who responded to Ofsted's Parent View survey would recommend the school to others.

Most staff are very positive. A small number raised concerns about staff workload. Newer teachers say that they are well supported. The local authority is providing support to the leaders.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are not effective.

Leaders and staff at all levels are not up to date on the legal guidance to keep children safe. Leaders do not have effective safeguarding processes to identify and help pupils who are at risk. Designated senior leaders do not keep a close enough eye on the welfare of individual pupils who have been flagged as being at risk. Some of the most vulnerable pupils do not receive the support they need quickly enough.

Leaders have failed to keep abreast of important changes to national safeguarding information and legal guidance.

Governors do not hold leaders to account and have not demonstrated that they are able to carry out their statutory safeguarding duties.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Leaders and governors are not using the most up-to-date legal guidance to take all reasonable action to protect the most vulnerable children. Systems for recording concerns exist, but serious concerns are not being referred promptly or at all. This is because leaders and governors do not have enough strategic oversight of systems or processes. Therefore, the most vulnerable pupils do not get the precise and timely support they need. Leaders need to ensure that all staff, including the most senior leaders and governors, are well trained in the most up-to-date legal guidance and stay abreast of changes and updates. Leaders and governors need to use this guidance to ensure that systems and processes for safeguarding vulnerable pupils are protected.
- Governance has not checked leaders' work well enough. Therefore, governors are not secure enough in their understanding of pressing priorities, such as for behaviour and safeguarding. Governance needs to ensure that governors have the skills to carry out their safeguarding duties and responsibilities well. Governors need to routinely monitor and review safeguarding practices in the school.
- Systems for ensuring that behaviour improves are not rigorous. Behavioural incidents are not recorded routinely and there is no analysis of behaviour to help improvement. As a result, leaders are not identifying and addressing the poorer behaviour of a small minority of pupils outside lesson times. Leaders need to ensure that behaviour is recorded and monitored closely so that they know how well pupils behave across the school.

Leaders and those responsible for governance may not appoint early career teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

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.

If you are the school and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

Further information

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

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route.

School details

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| Unique reference number | 117285 |
| Local authority | Hertfordshire |
| Inspection number | 10207184 |
| Type of school | Primary |
| School category | Community |
| Age range of pupils | 2 to 11 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | 712 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Sharon Heraty |
| Headteacher | Tom Evans |
| Website | www.martinswood.herts.sch.uk |
| Date of previous inspection | 10 December 2020, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 |

Information about this school

- Martins Wood Primary School is considerably larger than the average-sized primary school.
- Most pupils are from White British backgrounds.
- The school has a pre-school.
- The nursery provides education for some children part time and others who attend for 30 hours a week.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this inspection under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We deemed the inspection a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

In accordance with section 44(2) 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 it might in all the circumstances reasonably be expected to perform.

This was the second routine inspection the school had received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed any continued impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.

- Inspectors held meetings with the headteacher, deputy headteacher and key stage and phase leaders. The lead inspector held a meeting with five members of the governing body, including the chair of governors, over the three days. A conversation was held with a representative from the local authority.
- Inspectors took account of a wide range of information, including the school's improvement plans and records of safeguarding concerns. School policies, documents and records relating to safeguarding, including the single central record and minutes of governing body meetings, were scrutinised.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school site. Inspectors also reviewed attendance and other information provided by school leaders.
- Inspectors took account of 63 responses to Ofsted's staff survey and 53 responses to Ofsted's Parent View survey. An inspector spoke with parents on day 3 of the inspection.
- Inspectors spoke with a group of boys and girls separately, particularly about safety, behaviour and their learning.
- The subjects covered in depth as part of this inspection were reading, mathematics, geography, science, physical education and art. In each subject, inspectors spoke with subject leaders, teachers and pupils. Inspectors visited lessons and looked at pupils' work.

Inspection team

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|-----------------------------|-------------------------|
| Cindy Impey, lead inspector | Her Majesty's Inspector |
| Simon Harbrow | Ofsted Inspector |
| Damian Loneragan | Her Majesty's Inspector |
| Sean Tobin | Ofsted Inspector |

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