

26 September 2018

Miss Rachel Appleby  
Head of School  
St Martin's School  
Markland Road  
Dover  
Kent  
CT17 9LY

Dear Miss Appleby

### **Short inspection of St Martin's School**

Following my visit to the school on 13 September 2018, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. The visit was the first short inspection carried out since your predecessor school was judged to be good in March 2014.

#### **This school continues to be good.**

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

You have secured notable developments in the school's work since it became part of the multi-academy trust in 2016. Together with the executive headteacher you have provided well-targeted training and support for staff which has improved the quality of teaching. Pupils have benefited from this improved teaching and a focus on developing their learning behaviours. As a result, you have established a calm, hard-working and friendly atmosphere in the school.

You have secured significant improvements in the quality of teaching and learning in the early years. As a result, children make much stronger progress than previously. The proportion of children achieving a good level of development in 2017 was above the national average and higher than in 2016.

Governors work collectively to check thoroughly all aspects of the school. They know the school well and have a clear understanding of the strengths and areas for improvement. They provide rigorous levels of challenge and work closely with leaders and staff to ensure that the school improves further.

Staff have worked well together to create a revised curriculum. This is helping pupils to make meaningful links across subjects in their learning. However, you have rightly identified that implementation of the curriculum is at an early stage. Opportunities to develop mathematical challenges across the curriculum are not yet

in place.

Pupils enjoy coming to school. They told me, 'It's safe, fun and I like it' and that the teachers are 'just right'. Pupils are finding their newly revised curriculum exciting. They are keen to learn about topics such as space and Pompeii, particularly when their learning is supported by interesting texts and practical experiences. However, in subjects such as mathematics and science some pupils do not feel their thinking is regularly stretched and challenged.

Pupils value the opportunities to be an active part of their school, for example by leading assemblies and running clubs. They are motivated by rewards such as the reading pond, which encourage them to read more frequently. Pupils are keen to extend their reading once the library renovations are complete. They do not currently always have access to the range of books they need to make informed reading choices or extend their reading repertoire.

Attainment is improving across the school. Some of the information about pupil performance gathered before joining the trust was very high. This makes progress information between key stages appear to be low in some year groups. However, progress from starting points can be clearly seen in the work in pupils' books. More recent comparisons between year groups since joining the trust indicate improving progress. Nevertheless, leaders know that there are times when teachers could do more to challenge pupils.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. All the necessary checks are in place for recruitment and are well supported by meticulous record-keeping. Leaders know the school and the community well and this allows them to spot when things are not as they should be.

Parents who spoke to me or completed the Ofsted online questionnaire Parent View are confident that their children are safe and well cared for at school.

Staff and governors are well trained in safeguarding pupils and know the key factors that may put them at risk. They are especially vigilant regarding pupils' appropriate use of online technology. Pupils feel comfortable and confident about reporting any concerns to staff.

### **Inspection findings**

- During the inspection we looked closely together at the curriculum. Recent work across the trust has included a review of the plans for subjects and the grouping of learning into topics. Pupils have responded well to the changes. The teachers I spoke to were also confident that their new plans develop the necessary skills, knowledge and understanding in a meaningful and fun way. However, leaders are aware that regular review will be needed to ensure that improvement priorities are progressing according to the plans. Subject leaders have had the

training needed to do this effectively.

- Opportunities to read and write across the curriculum are plentiful. During the inspection we observed pupils using both fiction and non-fiction texts effectively to help structure their own writing. Teachers ensure that unfamiliar vocabulary is explained. Their expectations of grammar and punctuation are high. As a result, pupils are making good progress from their starting points in English.
- Pupils read regularly, although their choice of individual reading material is sometimes limited. As a result, they do not have experience of a wide range of authors and styles to guide their choices. Pupils who read to me did not have books that were sufficiently challenging for them. They are excited by the potential for increased reading provided by the renovation of the library, telling me, 'It looks cool, I'd like to use it more.'
- We looked closely together at the teaching of mathematics, particularly in key stage 2. In the 2017 end of key stage 2 national assessments, proportions of pupils attaining age-related expectations and greater depth standards were lower than those seen nationally. Effective training for teachers has ensured that expectations in mathematics have risen. As a result, more current pupils are attaining at age-related expectations and above than previously.
- Pupils are competent mathematicians. They have a firm grasp of facts such as their times tables and well-developed computational skills. More frequent opportunities to apply these skills in problem-solving and through explaining their reasoning have developed their mathematical fluency. Nevertheless, there are still occasions when the work pupils are set does not challenge them sufficiently. This can slow pupils' progress.

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers provide systematic challenge for pupils, both in their questioning and through the work that they set
- opportunities to extend mathematical skills across the wider curriculum are developed
- pupils read widely and regularly encounter texts in their individual reading which provide them with enough challenge.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Kent. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Deborah Gordon  
**Ofsted Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

During the inspection I met regularly both with you and the executive headteacher. I also met with members of the local governing body, the multi-academy trust and some staff. I reviewed documentation including: information about pupils' achievement; the school improvement plan; and safeguarding checks, policies and procedures. Together, we visited classes across the school. In lessons, I observed pupils learning, looked at their books and spoke to pupils about their work. I had a meeting with pupils to gather their views of the school. I heard some pupils read. I considered the views of parents I met on the playground, alongside 29 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including 16 free-text comments. I also considered the school's own survey information and 17 responses to the Ofsted staff survey.