

St Martin's School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	113042
Local Authority	City of Derby
Inspection number	301316
Inspection dates	23–24 May 2007
Reporting inspector	Steven Parker

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	58
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Pauline Inwood
Headteacher	Mrs Melsa Buxton
Date of previous school inspection	9 June 2003
School address	Wisgreaves Road Alvaston Derby Derbyshire DE24 8RQ
Telephone number	01332 571151
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

St Martins School educates students with an increasingly complex range of needs. The majority have behavioural, emotional and social difficulties with associated learning difficulties. Most students have previously attended mainstream schools or pupil referral units. Around a third join the school after the date of normal secondary transfer, some as late as Year 10, often as a result of exclusion from other schools. Most have attainments significantly below national expectations. The majority of students, but not all, come from deprived areas of the city and have backgrounds of social disadvantage. An unusually large number are entitled to free school meals. Students are predominantly from White British backgrounds with a very small number coming from dual heritage families. Many are known to social services or the justice system, three are looked after children and a significant minority are considered to be vulnerable. Boys outnumber girls by six to one. The school has Investor in People and Healthy School status.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

St Martins is a satisfactory school with some strong features. Good, highly focused pastoral care and support enables students to make impressive gains in their personal and social development. This helps them to become happy, confident and responsible learners, who are well prepared socially and emotionally for the next stage of their learning and adult life. Students are very positive about their school, and many feel that they have been 'rescued' from their earlier negative experiences. One girl spoke for many when she expressed her gratitude for being given a second chance by observing that 'I feel I am getting on so much better than I was before coming here'. Parents say that they appreciate this aspect of the school's work and feel that they are working in a productive partnership with staff.

All students make steady progress across all subjects, from a low base when they arrive, and achieve satisfactory results in an increasingly broad range of accredited courses by the end of their time in school. Standards do, though, remain lower than those found in mainstream schools, particularly for reading and writing, because of students' learning difficulties. Some students achieve impressive results in practical subjects such as art and design and design and technology. Many go on to productive college education and vocational training. Target setting for students is imprecise and does not properly involve them in evaluating their own progress. Neither is the school using the assessment information it gathers to best effect in planning their learning opportunities. It cannot, therefore be sure that that it is providing sufficient challenge, or that students are doing as well as they could. Teaching and learning are, therefore, satisfactory rather than good. Teachers and teaching assistants work in successful partnerships across the school, ensuring that students learn in a friendly and productive atmosphere. The developing work of the innovative personalised learning department has a significant impact on the confidence and progress of those students who are provided with highly focused support by its staff.

The satisfactory curriculum has breadth and increasing relevance as more vocational training opportunities are developed. It is enriched by clubs, residential experiences and community activities that engage students' interest. Older students have the opportunity to take part in college courses and work experience placements, but business and enterprise education is not yet sufficiently well developed.

Leadership and management are satisfactory overall. The headteacher has had a significant impact on the school in the short time she has been in post. She has communicated her strong strategic vision very effectively to all staff and this has led to significant improvements in staff morale and practice. The recently appointed deputy headteacher has strong complementary skills and they work in very effective partnership. Restructuring of senior and middle management responsibilities is starting to influence quality across the school, but there is some way to go before the benefits are realised. The school has a clear view of its strengths, although it is overly modest about some aspects, and it has made a realistic appraisal of and planned effectively for necessary improvements. It is, however, hampered by its underdeveloped approach to monitoring and evaluation across all its work. The governing body are now up to full strength and provide good support, although they are not yet holding the school properly to account. The school is well placed to improve its provision rapidly and provides satisfactory value for money.

What the school should do to improve further

- Make better use of the information it gathers about students' progress and achievements to:
 - inform planning to meet individual needs and - enable students to take more responsibility for their own learning.
- Develop more rigorous systems to monitor, evaluate and improve the school's performance across all aspects of its work.

A small proportion of 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

Students make solid progress as they move up through the school, so that their achievement is satisfactory. By the time they leave at the end of Key Stage 4, students generally reach lower levels in English than in mathematics and science, because they find reading and writing particularly difficult, although their speaking and listening skills are often better. Students' individual targets are not always met, because they are often too broad to enable progress to be measured accurately. There is no evidence that boys and girls or students from different ethnic backgrounds make progress at varying rates. Students with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties are able to make satisfactory progress in their learning because their behaviour and attitudes improve. For example, those in the personalised learning department are helped to develop coping strategies and learn to join in lessons, consequently improving their knowledge, skills and understanding. At the end of Year 11, all students gain satisfactory accredited results in courses such as the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN) Bronze or Silver awards and Entry Level certificates in mathematics and science. The current Key Stage 4 students now have better opportunities to gain a wider range of certificates and their achievements can, consequently, be recognised in most subjects.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The school is justifiably proud of its students' good personal development and well-being. It has developed a strong, positive ethos and staff express high expectations that everyone should be mutually supportive and respectful. Consequently, the school is a civilised and nurturing place, where students generally behave well and value the opportunities and support they are given to become mature young adults. Pupils understand well the importance of staying safe and healthy and participate enthusiastically in sport and other outdoor activities. The Healthy Schools award has recognised the efforts made to alert students to the need for healthy eating and the adoption of sensible lifestyles that avoid potentially damaging habits and situations. This is often a new experience for many of them and changes their attitude to learning for the better, resulting in considerably improved attendance, which is good for most of them. The regular celebration of this and their efforts and achievements through a structured rewards system is an important motivator. Strong pastoral support and the work of adult and peer mentors ensure that students are willing to share any difficulties they might have, such as bullying, confident that they will be dealt with speedily and effectively. The active school council

encourages students to express their views and opinions assertively, giving them all a sense of partnership in the life of the school and the wider community. Their spiritual and cultural sensitivities are well developed across the curriculum and they are taught to appreciate the needs and rights of others. They often initiate fundraising activities to help both themselves and those less fortunate. Students' good personal development, together with their basic skills provide a sound base for their life beyond school.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. Students like their teachers and enjoy learning. This is because relationships between staff and students are frequently very good. Teachers take care to choose activities and resources that interest students and motivate them to try hard and behave well. However, they do not always use their assessments of learning to effectively plan work that enables them to take the next small step. Often the task is the same for all, but some are given more support than others. This can mean, for instance, that higher attaining students are sometimes set work that is too easy. Teaching assistants make strong contributions to lessons. For example they unobtrusively prompt students to stay on task or volunteer answers to questions. Students themselves are not consistently made aware of how they can improve their work and are not routinely expected to learn as independently as possible.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The school has a satisfactory curriculum that provides broad and relevant experiences and focuses particularly successfully on the practical and social needs of its students. The main building is over a hundred years old and additional accommodation is in very poor condition. Whilst staff do their best to make the environment attractive and welcoming, students' quality of learning is constrained by these less-than-ideal surroundings. There are expectations that the school will be housed in new buildings during the next phase of the local authority's rebuilding programme. In the mean time, appropriate off-site arrangements have been made for physical education. Learning resources, including those for information and communication technology (ICT), are adequate, but require further enhancement to bring them up to an acceptable quality. Activities are generally well planned, but the key skills of literacy, numeracy and ICT are not consistently planned for across all other subjects of the curriculum. Current imaginative and potentially innovative planning for the next academic year is focused on improving this situation and incorporates more vocational training opportunities. There is good enrichment of learning through a wide range of extra curricular activities and attendance on college courses.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

A very strong commitment to pastoral care and support is at the heart of the school's work and close attention to the personal needs of students is one the most impressive features. The expanding scope of the personalised learning department is an important element in this approach. Good monitoring and follow up on behaviour and attendance has resulted in considerable improvements in both aspects. There are very secure child protection and

safeguarding procedures in place, and rigorous attention is paid to health and safety issues. The school works hard to build and nurture productive relationships with parents and carers and attendance at review meetings, workshop and social activities has increased significantly as a result. Good, collaborative links with other professionals and agencies, such as Connexions and the youth offending team ensure that students' additional needs are well supported. Whilst students are productively involved in setting and reviewing their own personal and behavioural targets, academic guidance is less secure.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory overall. The powerful working partnership between the headteacher and deputy headteacher has been an important factor in improving the school across all aspects. Their very strong commitment to model best practice, encouraging individuals' initiative and identifying and meeting everyone's training needs, is helping to make the whole staff team much more skilful and effective. Consequently, students' achievement and progress are being supported increasingly effectively. Managers at all levels are similarly being helped to meet the requirements of their posts, so that improvement planning is much more of a shared activity. This process is, however, constrained by under-developed approaches to gathering and analysing information about the school's work. Governors similarly lack sufficient performance data to enable them to challenge managers fully. Nevertheless, the gains made since the last inspection and the commitment to move the school forward indicate that the school has good capacity to improve.

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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
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4
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 behaviour of learners	2
The attendance of learners	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	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?	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?	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 performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	3
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

25 May 2007

Dear Students

Inspection of St Martin's School, Derby, DE24 8RQ

Thank you for the way you welcomed me and my colleague to your school. We found you confident, polite and friendly, and were impressed by your good behaviour and readiness to tell us about how important education has become for you. Special thanks must go to the members of your school council who confirmed your positive views and shared some helpful thoughts about what they think is good and what could be better. I am pleased to tell you that we agreed with you about what your school does well and some of the things you wanted improved.

These were the things we particularly liked.

- The very good support and encouragement that all staff give you makes you feel better about yourselves and much more positive about your life chances.
- Many of you are enjoying school for the first time and, as a result, are attending regularly.
- Teachers and teaching assistants help you to learn successfully and gain satisfactory results in exams by the time you leave.
- The school does its best to make sure that you can study relevant courses and take part in interesting activities outside school that help prepare you for your future lives.
- The headteacher is good at her job and helps all the staff to do their best for you.

These are the things that we have asked your headteacher and the governors to do to make your school even better.

- Help teachers to ensure that they use the information they collect about how you do your work to plan your learning more effectively.
- Involve you more in setting your own targets and finding out how well you are meeting them, so that you can take more responsibility for your own learning.
- Find better ways to collect and use information about the school to plan improvements in its work.

We wish you all the best in your studies and hope you get to do all the things you dream of. Do try to keep attending regularly. It will make such a difference to how successful you are in achieving them.

Yours sincerely

Steven Parker Lead inspector