

St Martin's Academy Chester

91 Hoole Road, Chester, Cheshire, CH2 3NG

Inspection dates 19–20 May 2015

| Overall effectiveness | Previous inspection: | Not previously inspected |
|--------------------------------|----------------------|--------------------------|
| | This inspection: | Outstanding |
| Leadership and management | Outstanding | 1 |
| Behaviour and safety of pupils | Outstanding | 1 |
| Quality of teaching | Outstanding | 1 |
| Achievement of pupils | Outstanding | 1 |
| Early years provision | Outstanding | 1 |

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school.

- Pupils make outstanding progress from the outset. No stone is left unturned in the drive to ensure children begin to develop into well-rounded young people.
- Teaching over time is strong and leads to exceptional outcomes for pupils. Excellent teamwork between teachers and teaching assistants is the key to ensuring that the specific needs of pupils are met very effectively.
- The school is led by a strong headteacher. She has a clear vision of high quality education built around British values of care, tolerance and respect.
- Without exception, everyone involved in running the academy is passionate about establishing a learning community where pupils' self-esteem and self-confidence can flourish.
- Governance is strong. Governors have been resolute in their determination to ensure solid foundations are laid for the future development of the academy.
- Strong links with partner schools have led to the academy's self-evaluation being focused sharply on how pupils' outcomes can be enhanced.
- The extended school day allows the academy to provide a broad range of curriculum enhancement activities which add significantly to the development of pupils' core skills.
- High quality technology can be seen throughout the school. Computers and tablets are used as tools for learning rather than tools for teaching.
- Pupils' progress in subjects such as art, music and French is often on a par with their excellent progress in the core skills of English and mathematics.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding is developed well because this aspect is woven seamlessly into the academy's values and throughout its rich curriculum.
- Pastoral care for pupils is outstanding and is focused on managing the individual needs of pupils very well.
- Strong systems have been put in place to keep pupils as safe as possible.
- Pupils behave exceptionally well throughout the day. Their outstanding behaviour contributes strongly to their rapid progress.
- Pupils exude confidence and excitement for learning. Respect for and tolerance of one another are cornerstones of each pupil's personal development.
- The views of parents are paramount at every stage of the academy's development. Communication with parents is a strength of the academy.
- Progress in the early years is rapid because everything that is exceptional about the academy is also encapsulated in this aspect of its provision.
- Pupils are exceptionally well prepared for the next stage in their education. Many pupils in both the Reception class and Year 1 are already working at levels well above those expected for their age.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed a selection of lessons taught in different subjects to Reception Year children and Year 1 pupils. The inspector observed several enrichment activities.
- The inspector scrutinised samples of pupils' written work across a range of subjects along with a selection of pupils' learning journals.
- The inspector observed behaviour around the academy including pupils at the breakfast club and during enrichment activities.
- The inspector held meetings with senior leaders, teachers, governors, parents, a director of the North West Academy Trust and a group of pupils.
- The inspector scrutinised a wide range of documentation provided by the academy including: self-evaluation by leaders; the academy's strategic plan; information on attendance; documents used to record behaviour incidents and safeguarding concerns; data relating to pupils' progress; records of leaders' monitoring of teaching and learning and of performance management and minutes of meetings of the governing body.
- The inspector took account of 33 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) along with 19 emails, sent to the school by parents for his attention. The inspector considered the nine questionnaires completed by staff.

Inspection team

Drew Crawshaw, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- St. Martin's Academy Chester opened as a Free School in September 2013. St. Martin's is a stand-alone academy that works closely with The Delamere Church of England Academy to share services through the North West Academy Trust.
- The academy is a school for children between the ages of four and 11 years. It is currently smaller than other primary schools. At the time of the inspection, there were 50 pupils on roll in two classes: the Reception class and Year 1.
- A very small proportion of pupils are disadvantaged and are supported by pupil premium funding (additional government funding to provide support for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and for those looked after by the local authority).
- The vast majority of pupils are White British and speak English as their first language.
- The ratio of boys to girls is broadly equal. No pupils on roll are disabled and none have been identified as having any special educational needs.
- The school provides a breakfast club from 8.00 am each morning. The school day operates from 8.30 am to 4.00 pm each day.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that the outstanding work of the first two years of the academy's life is built upon, by:
 - ensuring that governors make full use of the systems already in place to record the attainment and progress of pupils over time as a means of holding leaders even more rigorously to account by evaluating for themselves the impact of any actions, initiatives or spending in terms of pupils' progress
 - ensuring that all actions in the academy's strategic plan are evaluated in terms of their impact on pupils' progress.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are outstanding

- The academy's vision to provide an education for children which 'excites, challenges and stimulates their individual expression, whilst ensuring they achieve their maximum potential' has established high expectations from the outset. These expectations are met in every aspect of the school's work. Pupils' progress in terms of their academic, personal and social development is outstanding.
- The headteacher is passionate about ensuring that pupils reach their full potential in an environment where the values of care, respect, tolerance and choice are at the fore. Following her direction, leaders at all levels, including middle leaders and leadership in the early years, are very effective in promoting a whole-school ethos where pupils are eager to learn even more. Parents spoken to said that their children are disappointed when they cannot attend school at weekends and during holidays.
- Relationships between pupils and adults are strong because they are based on adults' precise knowledge of the specific needs of each child. Systems are in place to ensure that the school has an accurate understanding of what each pupil can and cannot do before they start the Reception class. Consequently, teachers provide additional support or challenge in order to ensure the fast pace of progress is maintained.
- Self-evaluation is accurate. Areas for improvement are identified and link closely to the school's strategic development plan. Leaders monitor the success of their actions in terms of the impact on pupils' outcomes. They track and monitor closely the progress of pupils from each of their starting points and act swiftly when a pupil's learning falters. The pupil premium funding is used to good effect to target rapid intervention whenever the needs of this group of pupils change. Disadvantaged pupils progress at the same rate as their peers during their time at the academy.
- Parents are kept well informed about the progress that their children are making. While formal systems of reporting, for example parents' evenings and pupil progress reports, are valued, parents feel that the accessibility of leaders and other adults each day is a key strength of the school. The parents spoken with were quick to point out that they have felt part of the, 'St. Martin's family,' from before the school opened. One parent wrote in an email to the inspector: 'Communication from school has been amazing. It has allowed us to be more involved in our children's learning.'
- The leadership of teaching is strong. Leaders make effective use of their links with partner schools by providing opportunities for teachers and their pupils to benefit from the sharing of outstanding practice. The school's own records show that the combination of leaders' monitoring of teaching along with high quality professional development has raised standards across the school, particularly in English.
- The academy's system for performance management is robust. All adults have been set specific targets related closely to the strategic development plan. The school's performance management system for pay and progression takes into account teachers' success in securing pupils' rapid progress.
- The curriculum is rich and varied. Information and communication technology brings the curriculum to life and broadens the variety of learning opportunities. The extended school day allows pupils to benefit from enrichment activities such as computer coding, dance workshops and creative arts. Primary sports funding is used effectively to ensure that each child receives at least three hours of high-quality physical education per week. This well-thought-out approach to learning promotes pupils' enjoyment in learning while maintaining the academy's emphasis on the development of the whole child.
- Pupils are prepared well for life in modern Britain. Their immersion in high quality, up-to-date, information technology is beginning to equip pupils well to access modern society. Pupils' involvement in debates around which topics should be taught next hones their speaking and listening skills and also provides opportunities for them to show respect for the differing opinions of others. Pupils, including children in the Reception class, are beginning to develop an awareness of democracy in action by taking part in a voting system to elect members to the school council.
- The promotion of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is integral to the academy's values. Pupils benefit from a wide range cultural experiences including music, speaking an additional language, art and sport, along with frequent educational visits to museums. Assemblies bring together the school's strong work on promoting fundamental British values by introducing pupils to an appropriate range of topics such as forgiveness, democracy and helping others.
- The academy has established an effective external support network including partnerships with other outstanding schools, the North West Academy Trust, and with a specialist consultant. Close links with local schools and the local authority, ensure that standards are at least in line with the best of other schools.
- The academy's arrangements for the safeguarding of pupils meet statutory requirements. Staff and governors receive suitable safeguarding training.

■ The governance of the academy:

- Governors are a valuable asset to the academy. Governors bring a wide variety of personal and professional experience, which serves to enhance the overall quality of leadership. They know the academy well and have used this knowledge effectively to steer the academy safely through the first stage of its development.
- Governors have received training in their role from the local authority. Several governors have received training in safer recruitment procedures and all have completed training in the safeguarding of children.
- Governors have an excellent oversight of the academy's finances. They know how funding, including the pupil premium, is spent. Governors have devised a solid financial plan through which the school can develop to its full capacity. However, governors' understanding of how all spending impacts on pupils' outcomes is less well developed. Consequently, governors are not able to pinpoint, with accuracy, which spending provides the best value for money in terms of pupils' outcomes.
- Records of governing body meetings show that governors set performance targets for the headteacher. Governors are effective in their use of targets from the school's strategic plan to both evaluate the performance of teachers and also as a means of evaluating the overall effectiveness of the school.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding. Pupils' attendance is high and matched by their punctuality at the beginning of the school day. Pupils' attitudes to learning are outstanding. Pupils arrive at school each morning brimming with excitement and eager to learn. They leave school at the end of each day no less excited, wanting to talk with their parents to share their new learning.
- Leaders have established a detailed behaviour management policy which is implemented consistently well by all adults. As a result, the systems put in place to record serious incidents such as bullying and racism, for example, are yet to be used because there have been no incidents to report.
- Clear instructions and direction by adults ensure that pupils know exactly what is expected of them. Consequently, the trust between adults and pupils is strong. Pupils respond exceptionally well to being given responsibility for their own learning and this contributes to their outstanding progress. For example, children in the Reception class were observed using tablet computers to record one another's reactions to eating 'space ice-cream'; this in turn led to them writing some excellent descriptive sentences.
- Pupils' behaviour during breakfast club is excellent. Pupils who do not attend breakfast club arrive at the academy from 8.30 am each morning and quickly become involved in activities designed to embed their previous learning. Behaviour during the extended school day is of an equally high standard to that seen during lessons and at playtime.
- The parents spoken with, along with those who responded to the online survey, Parent View, feel that their children behave well at the academy. Parents spoken with also agree that their children have grown in confidence since joining St. Martin's. Pupils were observed by the inspector in all aspects of the academy's routines; without exception, they showed respect and courtesy towards one another. Pupils spoken to were polite and well-mannered but, above all, talked with an assurance about their learning that was well above that typical for their age.

Safety

- The academy's work to keep pupils safe and secure is outstanding.
- Robust systems are in place to check the suitability of all adults who work at the academy. The academy's record of checks also includes a record of appropriate training undertaken by adults, such as safer recruitment, first aid and safeguarding training. This enables leaders to have a clear overview of where additional training in relation to safeguarding may be required.
- Leaders take a proportionate view with regard to the information they give to pupils, in the Reception class and Year 1, about how to keep themselves safe. For example, leaders engaged a local police community support officer to speak with parents about e-safety and how to keep their children safe when they use the internet. However, when appropriate, for example in Road Safety Week, the direct involvement of pupils ensures that they gain the necessary skills to keep themselves safe.
- Pupils feel that they are safe in the academy and their parents agree. Pupils are confident that they can turn to adults if they have a problem. Parents spoken with felt that the availability of teachers, teaching assistants and leaders at the beginning and end of each day, ensured that any potential issues were nipped in the bud. Consequently, many parents were unable to comment on the school's anti-bullying procedures because they felt bullying does not occur in the school. The school's own records corroborate

this view.

- The school's health and safety systems are robust. Leaders ensure risk assessment procedures are followed and implemented whether within the academy or during external activities.
- High-quality training, carried out by the local safeguarding children board, ensures that all staff are alert to the signs of abuse and know how to act when they come across the maltreatment of pupils. Leaders have put in place a suitable recording system to record their actions when concerns arise.

The quality of teaching

is outstanding

- All pupils are absorbed in their learning because teachers set interesting tasks which build on pupils' understanding and they challenge them to do their best in every lesson. Teachers communicate high expectations and pupils respond with enthusiasm.
- Pupils make outstanding progress because teachers' assessment of their specific needs is used exceptionally well to ensure that every pupil is actively engaged in learning. Teachers, along with teaching assistants, are single-minded in their approach to accelerating pupils' progress. Teachers routinely check the progress of all groups of pupils, including the most able and the disadvantaged, then adapt the support or the level of challenge to ensure individuals concerned can make at least good progress.
- Teachers and teaching assistants make the best use of pupils' enthusiasm by providing a learning environment which captures each pupil's natural curiosity about the world in which they live. Interesting topics such as 'growing together' and 'destination outer space' bring learning to life and help pupils to contextualise their learning. For example, children in the Reception class were observed helping an alien to halve numbers on his planet. These children were making outstanding progress.
- Literacy and numeracy are embedded throughout the curriculum. Pupils enjoy reading both in the academy and at home. Pupils are given an excellent range of opportunities, before, during and after lessons to practise their skills in reading, writing and mathematics so that any progress is secure.
- Teachers' excellent use of information and communication technology ensures that pupils are well prepared for their next steps and for life in modern Britain. Children use computers as tools for learning. For example, groups of Year 1 pupils used tablets to record pictures of three-dimensional shapes around the academy. These pupils made rapid progress because the activity was matched well to their specific needs.
- Teachers of different year groups share information about the learning of pupils well. Information gathered about the learning of children prior to them starting in the Reception class is used effectively by teachers to plan lessons which meet children's needs from the outset. Teachers use detailed learning journals for each child as a means of recording progress once in the academy. These records, along with leaders' own data, show that the transition from the Reception class into Year 1 is managed very effectively by teachers and the rate of progress is maintained throughout.
- The extended academy day ensures that all pupils access high-quality enrichment opportunities in which the standard of teaching remains excellent. Consequently, pupils make rapid progress in everything they do while at the academy. For example, Year 1 pupils were observed using a computer coding application in order to get to grips with variables such as sequence, selection and repetition in programs that they were designing for themselves. This work is well beyond that expected for their age and represents outstanding achievement.

The achievement of pupils

is outstanding

- On entry to the academy, pupils' prior attainment is strong overall. From each of their starting points pupils, including the most able, disadvantaged and those who receive additional in-school support with their learning, progress rapidly in English and mathematics as they move through the academy.
- As a result of their rapid progress, all children in the Reception class reach the level expected for this age group. Also, a higher proportion of pupils in Year 1, compared to their peers in other schools, are on track to reach standards well above that expected for their age. The academy's own data show that a sizeable proportion of pupils currently in Year 1 are already mastering skills that they are expected to acquire by the end of Key Stage 1.
- Leaders ensure that each pupil has an equal opportunity to reach their full potential. Disadvantaged pupils progress at the same rate as all other pupils within the academy. The academy's own assessment data show that there are no gaps between the achievements of different groups of pupils.
- Although no pupils are identified as having special educational needs, a small proportion is given

additional in-school support to boost their literacy and or numeracy skills. These pupils progress at the same rate as all other pupils within the academy.

- The most able pupils, as with all other pupils, are challenged to do their best at every opportunity. The academy's own data show that the most able pupils progress rapidly in both the Reception class and Year 1. This view is corroborated in pupils' work, which includes pieces of high quality writing, along with by listening to pupils reading fluently about topics such as the story of the South African, Paralympic gold medal winner, Natalie Du Toit.
- Standards overall, including for disadvantaged pupils, are very high in reading and writing compared to the average for non-disadvantaged pupils of a similar age. Standards overall, including for disadvantaged pupils, in mathematics are high compared to the average for non-disadvantaged pupils of a similar age.
- Pupils make strong progress in a range of non-core subjects such as physical education, music and art. In physical education for example, pupils in the Reception class were observed mastering a baton changeover in the relay. In music, Year 1 pupils were observed singing in time along with taking responsibility to lead the group while performing a song. Examples of pupils' art work adorn the walls of many rooms across the school and demonstrate well pupils' ability to apply their artistic skills in a range of media.
- All the parents who responded to the online survey Parent View feel that their child is making at least good progress at St. Martin's.

The early years provision

is outstanding

- From their starting points, children in the Reception class make outstanding progress. They make a strong start in the Reception class because of the emphasis adults give to developing children's personal and social skills through exciting play opportunities. Consequently, children's self-confidence blossoms and with it their desire to extend their learning in other areas such as English and mathematics.
- Children are safe and cared for well. Children build their trust in the Reception class staff quickly. As a result, they learn rapidly to share and get along with each other. This contributes to their rapid progress in all aspects of their learning. During the inspection, children were observed working purposefully together, using a tablet computer to gather information about their partners' thoughts and feelings. In a physical education lesson, children were working effectively in teams to win a relay race.
- Children's behaviour and respect for each other and for staff are outstanding. Children take time to listen to one another. They speak to adults frequently, explaining their learning and hypothesising about problems that have been set for them. Children speak enthusiastically to visitors about their learning. This extends their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well.
- Children show excellent respect for the environment in which they work and play. Children are frequently involved in the decision-making process around the planning and organisation of their classroom, along with discussing what they want to learn. Consequently, very little time is lost when children move from one activity to another because children know what they want to find out or learn.
- Children's application of number is developed well during their time in the Reception class. For example, during the inspection, children were observed counting and halving single and two digit numbers up to 30 in range of different contexts.
- Children show excellent progress in developing their confidence and concentration skills as they begin to increase their reading and writing abilities. Almost all children work with sustained concentration, for example, when writing descriptive sentences or halving moon-dust using scales.
- Children's physical skills and their health and well-being are developed well through a broad range of activities. Children learn to ride bicycles, use scooters, skip and balance. Specific lessons such in physical education support the development of children's teamwork skills well.
- Children are very well prepared for their transition into Year 1. All children in last year's Reception class achieved a good level of development. The academy's own data along with the scrutiny of children's work presented in their learning journals, show that all children in this year's Reception class are on track to achieve a good level of development.
- Leadership and management of the early years provision are outstanding. Excellent use of adults' assessment of the progress children are making along with the subsequent fine-tuning of the teacher's planning, ensures that the high rate of progress is maintained throughout the Reception class year.

What inspection judgements mean

| School | Grade | Judgement | Description |
|--------|---------|----------------------|--|
| | Grade 1 | Outstanding | An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment. |
| | Grade 2 | Good | A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment. |
| | Grade 3 | Requires improvement | A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection. |
| | Grade 4 | Inadequate | <p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> |

School details

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| Unique reference number | 139377 |
| Local authority | Cheshire West and Chester |
| Inspection number | 450015 |

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

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| Type of school | Primary |
| School category | Academy free school |
| Age range of pupils | 4–11 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | 50 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Brendan Wignall |
| Headteacher | Wenda Smith |
| Date of previous school inspection | Not previously inspected |
| Telephone number | 01244 981254 |
| Fax number | Not applicable |
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