

St Martin's School Brentwood

Hanging Hill Lane, Hutton, Brentwood, CM13 2HG

Inspection dates 16–17 May 2013

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school.

- Attainment has been high for several years and continues to improve. The proportion of students gaining five good GCSE grades including English and mathematics at the end of Year 11 is consistently well above the national average.
- Students make outstanding progress in most of their subjects including English, mathematics, design technology and science.
- The school makes sure that disabled students and those who have special educational needs achieve as well as their peers. Gaps in attainment between disadvantaged students and others are closing.
- Achievement in English is outstanding overall although there are some small variations across year groups.
- The sixth form is good and improving rapidly as a result of some excellent teaching and one-to-one support that encourages all students to succeed.
- Teaching in all key stages is very rarely less than good and is often outstanding. Teachers take account of students' previous learning in planning challenging and inspiring activities.
- Teachers are particularly skilled in shaping questions that probe and deepen students' understanding.
- Marking is thorough, frequent and rigorous. Students routinely respond to teachers' comments.
- There are very effective systems in place to check students' progress and to identify any underachievement. Swift actions are taken to help students catch up.
- Students' attitudes to learning are excellent. They come to school ready to learn and take a full and active role in the life of the school.
- Students feel safe at the school and actively prevent bullying through the peer mentoring and prefect systems.
- The headteacher, supported by the governors and an able and talented senior team, offers strong leadership that has ensured high standards have been maintained and the progress students make has improved.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 52 lessons, of which 10 were joint observations with senior leaders. In addition, the inspection team made a number of short visits to lessons as part of themed learning walks.
- Meetings were held with four groups of students, a member of the Governing Body and school staff, including middle and senior leaders.
- Inspectors took account of the 175 responses to Parent View.
- The inspectors observed the work of the school and looked at a number of documents, including minutes of governors' meetings, the managing of staff performance, records relating to attendance, behaviour and checks on the quality of teaching and documents relating to safeguarding.

Inspection team

Simon Blackburn, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Concetta Caruana	Additional Inspector
Gay Tattersall	Additional Inspector
Jane Ladner	Additional Inspector
Matthew Portal	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This is a larger-than-average sized secondary school.
- About a tenth of students are from minority ethnic groups and the proportion of students who speak English as an additional language is below the national average.
- The proportion of students known to be eligible for support through the pupil premium, additional government funding for students known to be eligible for free school meals, looked-after children and those from service families, is well below average.
- The proportion of disabled students and those with special educational needs supported through school action is well below average and the proportion supported at school action plus or who have a statement of special educational needs is below average.
- The school uses Havering College and other vocational providers to provide some work-related learning opportunities to support its students.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.
- St Martin's School converted to become an academy school on 1 July 2011. When its predecessor school, of the same name, was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged to be good.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Continue to improve achievement in the sixth form so that it matches that of the rest of the school by ensuring the highest level of challenge for the most able students.
- Sharpen the impact of teachers' good marking by making sure they:
 - always provide clear and specific guidance on how students can improve their work
 - always pay sufficient attention to improving students' spelling, punctuation and grammar in their work.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is outstanding

- Students join the school with starting points that are well-above average in English and mathematics. The standards they reach at GCSE are significantly higher than those found nationally, with more than three quarters of students attaining five good GCSE grades including English and mathematics every year and a much higher than average proportion of pupils taking GCSEs gain the highest grades in a wide variety of subjects.
- The progress students make in a variety of subjects is outstanding. This includes in English and mathematics. When compared to other schools nationally, the proportions of students making better-than-expected progress from their starting points is high. In 2012, the progress of students in geography and some science subjects was below average but robust actions taken by senior leaders to improve teaching has resulted in significant gains in achievement. The school does not enter students early for GCSE examinations.
- Progress across year groups is also outstanding in most subjects. The school's own records of current progress show that progress in Key Stage 3 is particularly strong in both English and mathematics and that while students' progress across both key stages is outstanding in English, the progress of students currently in Year 10 is good rather than outstanding.
- Students make good, rather than outstanding progress in the sixth form. The achievement of students in AS level subjects has been on an upward trend for a number of years and their progress is above average. The progress of students currently studying A level courses is better than in previous years as a result of good academic mentoring and rapidly improving teaching.
- Students make consistently good and outstanding progress in most of their lessons as a result of outstanding teaching that takes students' previous learning into account when planning challenging activities for them. Questioning that demands thought and deepens understanding is a particular strength of the school.
- The small number of students in each year group eligible for support through the pupil premium are making similar progress to other students. In 2012, there were significant gaps in their attainment but the school has worked hard to ensure that targeted support is having the impact that is intended and eligible students currently in Year 11 are set to achieve GCSE results that are less than half a grade below other students. This compares favourably with the national picture.
- Disabled students and those who have special educational needs also achieve very well as a result of high quality teaching and very effective and well-coordinated support, the impact of which is closely monitored. In mathematics, their progress is more variable than in English but they make better progress than their peers in Years 10 and 11.
- Students from minority ethnic backgrounds make similarly outstanding progress to their peers across all subjects and year groups and there is no difference in the rates of progress of girls and boys.
- Students who follow courses at Havering College and other vocational providers for part of the week make good progress and their behaviour and attendance is carefully monitored by the school.

- The Year 7 catch-up premium is being used to fund a dedicated teacher who keeps a careful check on the progress of the small number of eligible students and ensures they receive the additional support they require.
- The school places a great deal of importance on literacy development and the 'DEAR' project (Drop Everything And Read) is promoting reading for all students. Some Year 7 students have made outstanding progress in their reading as a result of this and other initiatives and the library lending rates have increased, with students borrowing an average of 10 books per student per year. The school library is a vibrant hub of the school with a wealth of resources that makes an outstanding contribution to literacy development across the school.

The quality of teaching

is outstanding

- Teaching in all key stages is very rarely less than good and it is often outstanding. Teachers have very high expectations of all students and they respond well to the challenges posed. In the best lessons, they make excellent contributions to their own and to each other's learning.
- There is a great deal of consistency in the approach taken to lesson planning across all subjects. Teachers have access to a wealth of data and information about students' progress that they use very effectively to plan activities that are demanding for all the students in the group. The planning does not always detail specific strategies to meet individuals' needs but inspectors saw a range of methods used to make sure that they made the fastest possible progress.
- Teachers' use of questions was a strength of teaching seen during the inspection. Teachers ask thought-provoking questions that challenge students to consider alternative ideas and to make links with previous learning. In a sixth form economics lesson, the teacher skilfully turned an intelligent question from a student back to the theory they were studying and the student was able to work out how this explained the latest evidence.
- Teachers set challenging targets for individual lessons that have clear success criteria so that students know what they are aiming for. In the large majority of lessons, they set a very rapid pace and consistently check the progress students are making, successfully adjusting the lesson when they find there is a lack of understanding or that a group of students is falling behind.
- Marking of work is thorough, rigorous and frequent. Where students mark their own or each other's work, the teacher often checks that the targets have been met. There is a routine of students responding to teachers' marking that ensures that students are using the comments teachers make to improve their work. In a few lessons, the comments teachers write are not specific enough and occasionally, opportunities to improve spelling, punctuation and grammar are missed.
- Teaching in sixth form lessons is good. Students appreciate the smaller class sizes and the more relaxed relationships with teachers and they feel that teachers give a lot of their own time to making sure students understand the work they are given. In some sixth form lessons, the most able students are not being stretched by work that really challenges them and as a result they are not reaching the very highest grades.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

are outstanding

- Students have excellent attitudes to learning. They come to school ready to learn and to succeed

and have high expectations of themselves and the school. A Year 7 'honours' assembly exemplified the attitudes students have towards their learning. All students were very keen for their class to be awarded prizes for attendance and house points for a range of learning activities.

- Students' behaviour in lessons is calm, considerate and courteous. The school is spread across a large site and movements between lessons are purposeful and positive so that punctuality to lessons is never less than very good.
- A small number of concerns raised by parents relating to behaviour were considered by inspectors during the inspection who found that the school responded appropriately and in a timely manner. Students report that behaviour is good in the school and that it has improved significantly over the last two years. This corresponds to the introduction of the 'Discipline with Dignity' programme that is used consistently and effectively to support the very highest expectations of behaviour.
- Attendance is above the national average and improving. The number of fixed-term exclusions has been higher than the national average but is now reducing. The school has had a 'zero tolerance' policy towards poor behaviour that has had a clear impact on students' expectations of behaviour. Any excluded student is monitored carefully, provided with relevant work and receives full support on their return to school.
- Students report that bullying of any kind is extremely rare because the school takes it very seriously and it is dealt with very effectively. Students are aware of the different forms of bullying, including cyber-bullying, and they know how to keep themselves safe. Students are active in preventing all kinds of bullying through the peer mentoring and 'Prefects in Peer Support' (PiPS) programmes which train the students with the best attitudes to learning to support other students.

The leadership and management are outstanding

- The headteacher provides very strong leadership and is supported by a talented and committed senior leadership team. Together, they have brought about significant improvements in behaviour, maintained high standards of attainment and improved the progress of students across the school.
- Students are set challenging targets and their progress towards them is carefully tracked. Any potential underachievement is identified early and a range of actions are taken, including support funded by the pupil premium for eligible pupils. The achievement of all groups of students is carefully checked to ensure that students have equality of opportunity and that any discrimination is tackled.
- Where weaknesses in teaching or leadership are identified, for example in science or geography, action is quickly taken to support the staff concerned and to improve the quality of the learning experience for students. As a result, teaching has improved in these two subjects and they are projected to have much improved GCSE examination results in 2013.
- There are rigorous and effective procedures for managing teachers' performance. Teachers are held closely to account for the progress of students in their classes through targets that are linked to the Teaching Standards and their progression on pay scales is dependent on their reaching these targets.

- The leadership of learning is excellent. The senior leaders have a very strong determination to secure improvement in teaching as quickly as possible which is shared by ambitious and able subject leaders across the school. Professional development is used imaginatively to ensure teachers learn from each other's good practice.

 - The range of subjects available is wide and is constantly reviewed to make sure that it fits the needs of students. Together with numerous opportunities to participate in extra-curricular activities including sports clubs, musical experiences and drama productions, the school offers rich learning opportunities. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is further enhanced by strong partnerships with schools in other countries, encouragement to undertake positions of responsibility and highly successful artistic opportunities.

 - **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors have a very clear understanding of how well the school is doing because they take the time to visit the school and monitor the progress the school is making towards achieving its main objectives. Governors have a good understanding of the quality of teaching and the achievement of students. They have a good grasp of the performance data that the school presents and ask challenging questions that hold school leaders to account. They understand how the performance management procedures are used to improve teaching and the impact of initiatives they have supported in targeted subjects. They know what the school is doing to reward good teaching and tackle any underperformance. Governors monitor the school's budget carefully, including pupil-premium funding, and make sure that the school provides excellent value for money. Governors make sure that arrangements to safeguard students meet statutory requirements and are effective.
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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

Unique reference number	136875
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	403683

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1732
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	372
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Chris Plume
Headteacher	Mike O'Sullivan
Date of previous school inspection	11 December 2007
Telephone number	01277 238300
Fax number	01277 238301
Email address	enquiries@st-martins.essex.sch.uk

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