

Stepgates Community School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	125122
Local Authority	Surrey
Inspection number	340723
Inspection dates	4–5 February 2010
Reporting inspector	Marion Wallace

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	175
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Arther Davenport
Headteacher	Gillian Ward
Date of previous school inspection	4 February 2010
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. The vast majority of time was spent looking at learning: 11 teachers were seen; 15 lessons were observed; and meetings were held with parents, groups of pupils, governors and staff. Inspectors observed the school's work, and looked at its improvement plan and those of subject departments, minutes of governors' meetings, assessment information and curriculum planning. In addition the school's raising attainment plan, a scrutiny of pupils' work and 55 parent questionnaires received were analysed.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- the impact of senior management in bringing about improvements, especially in mathematics and science
- how well teachers use assessment to challenge different groups such as the more able and pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, especially in mathematics and science
- the impact of strategies to improve attendance.

Information about the school

The school is smaller than most primary schools. Its provision includes a 20-place speech, language and communication needs centre for pupils who have a statement of special educational needs. Pupils based in the centre integrate into mainstream classes for a varying number of sessions. Most pupils in the mainstream school come from Chertsey and the local area but some pupils in the centre come from north-west Surrey. A large majority of pupils are White British. A small number of pupils speak English as an additional language, but very few are at the early stages of learning English. The percentage of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is very high. A few pupils are eligible for free school meals. The number of pupils joining the school during the course of the year is above average. There is Early Years Foundation Stage provision in the Reception class. The school has achieved the Healthy Schools Award, Activemark and Investors in People Award. It provides a breakfast club and after-school club on the site. There is also a private pre-school on the site. These facilities are not managed by the governing body, and are subject to separate inspections.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

3

Main findings

Stepgates is a satisfactory and improving school. It has many good features. The headteacher, senior leaders and governors are particularly successful in advancing aspects of pupils' personal development and care. They are rightly aware that improving attainment remains a priority, particularly in mathematics and science. While achievement is satisfactory overall, the inconsistent impact of teaching hinders progress across different groups of pupils and subjects. Teaching is currently improving as a result of monitoring by senior leaders, and the proportion of good lessons is increasing.

The school has the following key strengths.

- The ethos is calm, friendly, warm and welcoming, relationships are very good and pupils make good gains in their personal development.
- The provision in the speech, language and communication needs centre is good and this contributes significantly to the good progress made by pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- Achievement is good in English.
- Partnership links to promote learning and well-being are strong.
- Pupils and parents appreciate the good range of extra-curricular activities.
- Care, guidance and support are strong, so pupils behave well and are sensible and enthusiastic learners. All individuals are valued.
- Links with parents are good. Most parents appreciate the parent workshops and active involvement in the school life.
- The headteacher and senior team lead the school well and have a clear vision for its future improvement.

There are three key weaknesses.

- Teachers do not consistently use assessment information to match tasks closely to the learning needs of pupils, especially the more able, or to show pupils clearly how to improve their work.
- Achievement in mathematics and science, especially for the more able pupils in Key Stage 2, is below that seen in English because teachers' lesson planning does not focus enough on building up and consolidating key skills.
- The roles of middle and senior managers have yet to be fully developed, particularly the monitoring and evaluation of initiatives and the rigorous identification of sources of weakness.

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The systems for evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of the school are improving its performance, but the effectiveness of the many initiatives undertaken is not fully evaluated. Nonetheless, the effective ongoing work to redress the dip in achievement in Key Stage 2 last year, other improvements since the last inspection and the confidence the school has already inspired in parents and the local community demonstrate its satisfactory capacity to improve.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Accelerate progress and raise attainment in mathematics and science by:
 - ensuring a consistent focus on the teaching of key skills, particularly in science and mathematics topics
 - giving pupils more experience of problem-solving in which to apply their numerical and scientific skills.
- Raise the quality of teaching so it is consistently good or better by:
 - ensuring that teachers make more effective use of information on pupils' prior attainment to plan lessons to challenge all groups, especially the more able
 - sharing examples of best practice across all staff
 - helping pupils know how to improve through consistently good quality marking.

About 40% of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

- Increase the impact of school monitoring and evaluation by ensuring that middle leaders evaluate initiatives more rigorously and act to remedy weaknesses.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**3**

Strong relationships contribute to a positive climate in which pupils enjoy learning. Achievement is satisfactory overall but good for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, who benefit from good support and challenge. In a Key Stage 2 literacy lesson pupils with a statement of special educational needs enthusiastically identified both the words that rhymed and the most effective words used to describe a poem about the fairground. However, the quality of learning varies too much. In some classes, tasks were not matched closely enough to the needs of all, especially those of the more able. Key skills, particularly in mathematics and science, are not consistently practised and applied, limiting pupils' achievement and future economic well-being. The best learning was observed in a Year 4 numeracy lesson, where high expectations, brisk pace and rigorous use of challenging questions ensured all groups of pupils made good progress and enabled them to extend and consolidate their learning about shapes. The school's tracking information and inspection evidence currently indicate significant improvement in attainment and progress for most groups who have underachieved in the past, particularly in Key Stage 2. Many pupils are currently progressing well enough to reach challenging targets. Pupils who do not speak English as their first language make the same progress as their peers. The 'Learning ladders' show next steps to improve and are used well by most teachers to help pupils know what they have to do to reach the higher level in their

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work. Analysis of pupils' work shows neat presentation, effective use of pupils' self-evaluation of their work, but inconsistent practice in marking.

Pupils feel safe and discuss problems freely with adults, knowing that any concerns will be dealt with effectively. All learners know what constitutes a healthy lifestyle. They enjoy their fruit breaks, and most attend the good range of activity clubs. Pupils make a good contribution to the school and locality through, for example, art exhibitions in the local library, singing for elderly residents and visits to St Peter's Church. Their involvement is well regarded in the local area but their interaction with the wider community is not yet substantial. All pupils work cooperatively with others. Pupils' good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development shows in their responsible actions towards others and in their respect for those with differing lifestyles and beliefs. Their awareness of cultural differences in the United Kingdom and internationally is less well developed.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

How effective is the provision?

A significant number of lessons observed during the inspection were good and at least satisfactory, but the use of assessment information is not consistent or rigorous enough in all classes. This undermines the effectiveness of teaching and means that the match of work to pupils' abilities is not always precise enough to ensure consistently good progress, especially for more-able pupils. Teachers use questions well to check pupils' knowledge and understanding and pupils appreciate well-planned opportunities to discuss

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their ideas with others during 'talking partner' sessions. The contribution made by teaching assistants is too variable, when support is strongest pupils with special educational needs and or disabilities make significant progress in their learning. Teachers mark work conscientiously but the quality of feedback to pupils on how to improve their work is also too variable.

The new creative curriculum generally matches pupils' needs but is not always well enough adapted to meet those of more-able pupils, particularly in mathematics and science. Its strengths lie in the personal and social education programme, which assists pupils' good personal development. Pupils enjoy the practical activities and visits outside school, such as to the Natural History Museum. Pastoral care is strong and parents agree this is a strength. Support for pupils who need additional help is well planned and is closely matched to their needs. One parent summed up the views of many when saying of her child, 'He has overcome severe difficulties and achieved so much more than expected; he is happy and confident.' The school works very well with support agencies. Induction and transition arrangements are good. All pupils receive very clear guidance on their behaviour and this is reflected in their good conduct. Good procedures are in place for checking attendance and consequently levels of attendance have improved significantly since the last inspection and are now satisfactory.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	3
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	3
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

Senior leaders and governors demonstrate drive and ambition to take the school forward. The headteacher has a clear vision and is determined to secure improvement. She has an accurate view of teaching and uses this information to sharpen provision and target the most important areas for improvement. The headteacher is well supported and challenged by an enthusiastic governing body which, with senior leaders, monitors and evaluates the work of the school adequately in most areas. Some members of the senior management team are new to their roles and tracking of achievement, although thorough, does not fully identify the reasons for weaknesses in particular subjects.

The school's promotion of equality reflects effective support and achievement for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, although this does not yet fully extend to provision for more able pupils. The school improvement plan identifies appropriate developmental areas to raise the effectiveness of the school from satisfactory to good. Close partnership with the local authority has effectively helped the school to strengthen the leadership team and improve the quality of teaching and learning. The school has established an extensive range of other partners and these are already beginning to have

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a positive impact on outcomes. For example, the partnership of Chertsey Children’s Centre and Chertsey Schools Partnership led to a joint art exhibition, music project and enhanced speech and language provision. Safeguarding procedures adequately meet requirements. Promotion of community cohesion is satisfactory. The school is aware of the range of the local community it serves, but links with the wider national and global community are less well developed. Leaders and managers are starting to evaluate the impact of initiatives, in order to improve pupils’ outcomes and to more clearly fulfil the school’s duty to promote community cohesion.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	3
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	3
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	3
The effectiveness of the school’s engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	3
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Early Years Foundation Stage

Most children enter Reception with skills and knowledge below those levels expected for their age. Many have weak communication, language and literacy skills. Children make good progress in their personal development because relationships are good and they develop confidence and a good attitude to school and learning. They make satisfactory progress in all other areas of learning. Children behave well and learn to play alongside and with others sensibly. More-able children enjoy counting and identifying numbers up to 20 on the number square. The teaching of letters and sounds is satisfactory.

Action rhymes are used well to reinforce learning but such activities do not always challenge different groups of children, especially during outdoor play. Adults encourage children to respond individually to questions and talk to each other, helping them to make sound progress in speaking and communication, but sometimes miss opportunities to target questions to children of different abilities. The learning in some lessons slows down because pace and expectation are not always clear. The outdoor learning environment is being developed well and is used adequately to extend learning. There is a suitable balance between adults initiating learning and children choosing activities for themselves.

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Good care and welfare contribute to children’s personal development. Good links with parents ensure children settle well into school life. There have been recent changes in leadership and management and the new leadership has not yet had time to make a good impact on the quality of the provision.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	3

Views of parents and carers

The very large majority of parents and carers are satisfied with the school. They regard it as happy, welcoming and friendly. They say children enjoy attending, make good progress and regard the school as caring and supportive. They appreciate extra-curricular activities, relationships with staff and the progress made by pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Most criticisms concerned behaviour. A few felt the school did not deal with unacceptable behaviour effectively. A very small minority felt the school did not take account of their views. Inspectors found that discipline was good and teachers made expectations of behaviour very clear, but a few pupils felt that the school did not always deal with unacceptable behaviour effectively. Other issues raised in the questionnaires were discussed with the school so that action can be taken to satisfy all parents.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	31	55	21	38	3	5	1	2
The school keeps my child safe	31	55	24	43	0	0	1	2
My school informs me about my child's progress	23	41	22	39	2	15	1	2
My child is making enough progress at this school	23	41	22	39	9	16	1	2
The teaching is good at this school	27	48	21	39	6	11	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	34	61	11	20	10	18	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	21	38	30	54	5	9	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	16	29	30	54	5	9	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	24	43	25	45	5	9	1	2
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	20	36	22	39	6	11	6	11
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	20	36	26	46	8	14	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	25	45	23	41	5	9	2	4
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	29	52	23	41	3	5	1	2

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools inspected between September 2007 and July 2008

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	39	58	3	0
Primary schools	13	50	33	4
Secondary schools	17	40	34	9
Sixth forms	18	43	37	2
Special schools	26	54	18	2
Pupil referral units	7	55	30	7
All schools	15	49	32	5

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above were reported in the Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2007/08.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



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6 February 2010

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Stepgates Community School, Chertsey, KT16 8HT

Thank you all very much for welcoming us to your school. We enjoyed talking with you and your teachers. We were impressed by how polite and well behaved you all were and how you all worked sensibly together. We will remember how well you sang your school song in assembly. Many of you and your parents told us how much you enjoy school and all the activities. We found your school to be a satisfactory and improving one. It has many good features.

These are the things we found that your school does well.

- You achieve well in English.
- You enjoy learning, behave well and know how to keep safe.
- You enjoy and benefit from the many activities, clubs, visits and visitors.
- Your school cares for you well and teaches you about how to be healthy and to respect and care for others.
- Your school council is well organised and is working well with the whole school.
- All staff and governors work well together to ensure your school continues to improve. Your headteacher has high expectations of you and she gives a strong lead to everyone.

There are three things that we have identified for staff and governors to improve:

- Make sure that you all reach higher standards in mathematics and science.
- Ensure that all teachers use assessment information to plan work that is closely matched to your ability so that you are all appropriately challenged.
- Make sure that all staff with special responsibilities check on the changes introduced, so that they can be sure all is going well, and take action if necessary.

You can help with these improvements by continuing to work really hard. Thank you for a very enjoyable visit to your school and best wishes for your future.

Yours sincerely

Marion Wallace

Lead inspector

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