

Stepgates Community Primary School

Stepgates, Chertsey, Surrey, KT16 8HT

Inspection dates 29–30 November 2012

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Standards are rising and are now much closer to those of most pupils in the country. Pupils make good progress from low starting points, especially in learning to read.
- The specialist support for pupils in the unit and for those who need extra help is successful in helping them to catch up.
- Pupils behave well and get on with each other. They have positive attitudes to learning and are proud to be part of the community at Stepgates.
- Teaching is good and improving. Teachers plan interesting activities and pupils respond enthusiastically.
- The headteacher sets high expectations for everyone. Through the learning and teaching project, leaders and managers have helped to improve the quality of teaching and learning.
- Staff are clear about what the school is trying to achieve and their part in it. There is a strong sense of commitment and teamwork.
- Governors are increasingly effective at asking the right questions to challenge the school's leaders. Many are frequent visitors to the school.
- Parents are content that their children are happy, safe and well looked after.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Not enough pupils reach higher levels of attainment when compared with all schools in England, especially in writing. Pupils' written work in other subjects is not as good as it is in literacy lessons.
- Teachers' marking and feedback are not always of the highest quality in all subjects to demand enough of pupils, especially the more able ones.

Information about this inspection

- The inspection team was made up of three inspectors, two of whom inspected for one day each.
- Inspectors observed 14 lessons or parts of lessons across the school. Of these, six were undertaken jointly with the headteacher. A series of short observations of pupils who receive specialist support was carried out jointly with the head of the Speech, Language and Communication Needs Centre.
- Inspectors looked at the work in pupils' books with the deputy headteacher. They listened to some pupils read and watched two assemblies.
- Inspectors met with groups of pupils and talked to pupils during lessons, in the playground and as they moved around the school.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, deputy headteacher, other senior leaders, two members of the governing body and the school's link inspector from the local authority. Inspectors spoke informally with other members of staff.
- Inspectors took account of the 26 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) and spoke informally with about a dozen parents as they brought their children to school at the start of the day. The questionnaires completed by 31 members of staff were considered.
- Inspectors looked at a range of documentation which included: the school's self-evaluation and plans for improvement; evidence about how teachers are set targets to improve pupils' progress and records of observations of the quality of teaching; minutes of meetings of the governing body; the school's information about pupils' progress over time; and records relating to safeguarding.

Inspection team

Jane Wotherspoon, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Sandra Hayes

Her Majesty's Inspector

Jean Whalley

Additional inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is smaller than most primary schools in England. There are more boys than girls in most classes.
- Around three quarters of pupils are of White British heritage. The remaining quarter come from a wide range of ethnic backgrounds. One in ten pupils do not speak English as their first language. Around 15% of pupils are from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller families.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs is very high. There are more with school action plans than in most schools in England. The proportion with school action plus plans or with a statement of special educational needs is much higher than average at around 24%.
- The school has a specialist unit for 20 pupils with speech, language and communication needs which is funded by the local authority. Pupils based in the centre spend varying amounts of time in mainstream classes according to their needs.
- The number of pupils eligible for the pupil premium (extra funding from the government) is above average.
- The number of pupils joining or leaving the school during the year is above average.
- The school meets the government's floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.
- There is a pre-school on the school's site which is run by a private company, registered with Ofsted and inspected separately from the school. Although not directly managed by the school, the headteacher and several governors are members of the management board of the pre-school. The breakfast and after-school clubs are also registered with Ofsted and inspected separately.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve standards in writing by making sure that teachers:
 - give pupils plenty of opportunities to use literacy skills in other subjects
 - provide more demanding work for those who can write well and more support for those who need it when they write in other subjects
 - expect the same quality from pupils' written work in other subjects as they do in literacy.
- Improve the way that teachers mark pupils' work in all subjects so that:
 - pupils are always given time to respond to their teachers' feedback
 - pupils are taught to recognise for themselves how their work can be improved
 - bright pupils are stretched even more.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Pupils' attainment has been low for many years but is rising securely. More pupils are working at, or close to, the levels expected for their age as they go through the school.
- There are gaps in the attainment of different groups of pupils when they are younger. Girls attain more highly than boys and those who are supported by extra funding do not do as well as others. By the end of Year 6, however, such gaps have been reduced. Standards at the end of Key Stage 2 have improved in the last two years and are now close to average. Not many pupils reach higher levels.
- Many pupils start in Reception with weak skills, especially in language and communication. They make good progress but many start Year 1 below where they should be for their age.
- The good progress that pupils make in Key Stage 1 in developing their phonic knowledge (the link between letters and the sounds they make) can be seen in two ways. First, by the end of Year 1 in 2012, more pupils reached the levels expected in the phonics screening test than in other schools in the country. Second, pupils in Year 2 reached levels in reading in 2012 that matched the national results. Levels of work in mathematics were also close to average, reflecting their good progress.
- Every pupil who left Year 6 in 2012, regardless of their background, ethnic origin or level of ability, made at least the progress expected of them in English during Key Stage 2, and around half of them made more progress than that. In mathematics, progress rates were similar to those in other schools, although more pupils made better progress.
- Pupils in the specialist unit make good progress. The flexible way of working – sometimes in the unit class and sometimes in their main class – helps pupils to make progress without being separated too much from their friends. Some return to their mainstream class permanently while others may leave the school to attend a mainstream school closer to home.
- Pupils who struggle with their work and those with special needs who are not in the unit also make good progress. They benefit from the expertise on the staff. Catch-up programmes help to close gaps in pupils' attainment.
- Reading has a high profile. Older pupils talk about their favourite authors and the recent visit from the author Ali Sparkes which has inspired them. In talking about the difference between reading the book and watching the film one said she preferred reading so she 'can create the vision in my head'.
- Although improving, writing remains a weaker area of pupils' work. Pupils in Year 5, for example, were able to talk about the features that poets use. They are beginning to write longer pieces with more exciting and interesting words but their work is sometimes spoilt by errors in spelling and punctuation. When comparing pupils' written work in their literacy books with the work in other subjects, it is clear that pupils are not always transferring the skills from one to the other.

The quality of teaching is good

- Much of the teaching at Stepgates is good. Parents responding to the online questionnaire (Parent View) agree that their children are taught well. Pupils, too, are confident that their teachers help them to learn so that they do well in school.
- Teachers make careful records of what pupils can and cannot do and use this information to plan learning that builds on their existing knowledge. When it is clear that pupils are not grasping things as quickly as they might, teachers adapt what they planned to do. The converse is also true. In a lesson in Year 1, the teacher speeded up the pace when pupils showed that they had understood quickly how to write a sentence.
- Pupils who need extra help and support both in the unit and in mainstream classes get tasks at just the right level. Learning support assistants are well briefed so that they know exactly how to

support the pupils in their group.

- The focus on speaking and on helping pupils to learn new words is strong. Frequently, teachers get pupils to talk to each other to help them work out what they want to say before answering a question. Often, teachers ask pupils to explain more. Displays of pupils' work and aids to learning include lists of key words for pupils to use in their work.
- In the Reception class, routines are well established and children choose for themselves from a wide range of activities that supports their all-round development. The emphasis on language and communication is clear from the opportunities for children to pretend to be the 'mechanic in the bike shop' or to perform on the stage for an audience of other children. The teacher encourages children to speak clearly and in sentences, providing a good model herself.
- Teachers plan many interesting activities that excite pupils, make them enthusiastic to learn and also help pupils to practise their writing skills in other subjects. They do not always make sure that the writing pupils do is of the same standard or quality as in English lessons. This is because, too often, the activities are not different enough for pupils of different abilities.
- Teachers mark pupils' work regularly with helpful comments that praise their efforts and tell them how to improve. In the main, pupils try to act on the advice they are given. The quality of marking is uneven across subjects and so does not always reinforce teachers' high expectations or challenge those who could be reaching higher levels in their work.
- A small amount of teaching observed was not of the same good quality. Here, teachers missed the chance to ask the right questions to check pupils' understanding or gave pupils some activities that were not quite at the right level. Importantly, though, teachers were able to analyse for themselves why the lesson was not as successful as it could have been and suggest how they would change what they did to help pupils learn more next time.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Parents and pupils say the school gives them a safe and happy experience. One pupil said, 'Everyone cares about us, we feel part of a community.' Pupils take responsibility for the well-being of others, for example, when prefects support younger pupils at playtime. Members of the school council understand they have an important job to represent the views of others.
- Pupils work and play well together. They cooperate during shared tasks in the classroom and in the playground. A group of older pupils playing chess at playtime gave advice to each other about the best move to make. In a lesson, pupils applauded spontaneously when another shared the work they had done. Another class has written thoughtful 'Friendship recipes'.
- Pupils move around the school sensibly. They are polite and well mannered to each other and to adults. They are friendly and welcoming to visitors. One pupil greeted an inspector by shaking her hand.
- In lessons, pupils usually behave well and are keen to learn. Rarely, when the work is not quite at the right level for them, some pupils become restless. Pupils are proud of their school and were aghast when an inspector suggested they might think of a way in which the school could be better. One said, 'It's perfect!'
- Leaders keep a close check on pupils' behaviour and deal quickly with any misbehaviour. The school works effectively with specialist services, and with much success, to support any pupils whose behaviour is challenging. Actions taken have been very effective. Very few pupils have been excluded in recent years.
- Pupils know how to keep themselves safe in school and outside. They understand the difference between bullying and 'falling out'. They know that bullying takes different forms such as 'silent' bullying and happens in different ways, such as on the internet. They are confident that any issues, including any rare instances of racist name calling, are always dealt with.
- Pupils are confident to ask for help when needed but 'Fix-it circles' – where a group of friends helps sort out a problem – work well. Pupils think carefully about the messages from assembly

and understand that actions have consequences.

- The school has worked hard to improve attendance, with some success. Attendance rates are rising and the number who are often absent is falling.

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher leads the school with a strong sense of purpose that promotes good teamwork. She and her deputy are focused and ambitious, wanting the very best for every pupil. Staff are positive about how the school is led and share the passion and commitment to improve.
- The headteacher and senior leaders check the quality of provision regularly using a range of methods to make sure that teaching is helping pupils to make good progress. They have an accurate picture of where teaching is good and where it needs to improve further.
- Plans for improvement show clearly what actions the school intends to take. The introduction of 'Lesson study' and the 'Learning and Teaching Project' have led to better teaching and achievement. Leaders check constantly to see if these activities are making a difference and make changes to their plans to speed up improvements where necessary. They set targets for teachers in relation to pupils' progress which teachers must meet to move up the pay scale.
- The school has introduced a new way of teaching the different subjects using topics and themes. This helps pupils to learn a good range of skills. Pupils enjoy the topic approach and particularly like the visits which are included, such as a recent one to the Tate Modern and Tate Britain art galleries. Together with opportunities to make music when singing and drumming, and to learn French, the visits strengthen pupils' cultural development.
- Pupils learn about how life in modern Britain is shaped by the past. They develop good social skills through the many opportunities to work together. Pupils learn about different beliefs and are given moments for reflection and prayer in assemblies.
- The school works well with parents. Parents value the opportunities to get involved in school life, such as the 'Parents in School' weeks where they are invited to join in lessons with their children. Several parents commented on the improving reputation of the school locally.
- The local authority has provided significant support to the school in the past. This has gradually reduced as the local authority has gained confidence that the school is strong enough to move forward on its own. The local authority's support for individual teachers to improve is successful.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors are involved in checking how well the school is doing. They often visit the school to find out what is happening and so do not rely solely on information from the headteacher. They know what the school does well and where it needs to improve. More and more they are asking the right questions of the headteacher about the quality of teaching in relation to teachers' pay and pupils' achievement. For example, they are able to say with confidence that the extra support provided through government funding is making a difference in raising standards for specific pupils. They have benefited from training which has helped them to carry out their responsibilities well and to make sure that requirements are met to keep pupils safe.

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	125122
Local authority	Surrey
Inspection number	402312

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	195
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Geoffrey Hackett
Headteacher	Gillian Ward
Date of previous school inspection	February 2010
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