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Mrs L Romans
Headteacher
Steep Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School
Church Road
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Dear Mrs Romans

Short inspection of Steep Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 8 December 2015, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. The visit was the first short inspection carried out since the school was judged to be good in February 2011.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Since taking up the permanent position of headteacher immediately after the previous inspection, you have maintained and built on the school's previous strengths. Your positive and determined leadership is recognised and appreciated by staff and parents. The close-knit family atmosphere you have cultivated is apparent in relationships at all levels.

Parents consider themselves to be fortunate to be part of the school community and speak very positively of the 'open-door' approach demonstrated by all staff in the school. Parents are rightly very pleased with the education and care provided, and say their children are very happy.

Relationships between pupils and teachers are positive and respectful. Pupils enjoy coming to school and are appreciative of teachers' careful planning to make learning fun. Pupils are motivated to learn and work hard in lessons. They demonstrate confidence and independence, sharing their ideas and asking questions when they are not sure.

Governors and leaders know the school very well. Leaders check teaching and learning regularly and make sure that teachers know how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve. Governors are well informed because they carry out their own checks to see for themselves what is going well, and what could be even better. However, leaders and governors could be even more aspirational for the school by setting more challenging targets for pupils and teachers.

Behaviour in lessons is good and often very good. The conduct of pupils during the collective worship, led by the vicar, was a pleasure to observe. There were, however, a few occasions outside lessons and at playtime when pupils did not manage their behaviour quite as well.

Since the previous inspection there have been changes to the teaching team. This has led to some variability in the progress pupils made in the recent past, which was evident in the end of key stage test results in 2014. Where teaching was weaker, you took decisive action. As a result, teaching is good again. This was reflected in the improvements in 2015 results. However, you recognise that achievement is still not quite as good as it could be in mathematics and writing.

Pupils with special educational needs are taught very well. Teaching is carefully tailored to meet their specific learning, social and personal needs, so that these pupils make good or very good progress. Pupils who are eligible for the pupil premium (government funding for disadvantaged pupils) catch up by the time they leave the school. This is because teachers check their progress regularly and, if the gap is not closing, make sure that extra support is put in place.

Since the last inspection, you have taken appropriate action to address the areas identified as needing improvement. Teachers now organise lessons well so pupils have plenty of time to work and are clear what they need to do to be successful. Most-able pupils are provided with extra work, although it is not always challenging enough to extend pupils' thinking and learning.

Grammar, punctuation and spelling, which were also identified at the previous inspection as being areas for improvement, are now taught well. Pupils use these skills effectively in their writing and in other subjects. However, in some classes pupils do not have enough opportunities to write longer pieces of work, so they are not getting enough opportunities to practise their skills.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are appropriately detailed. Policies are reviewed regularly to ensure that they are up to date and staff receive regular training which ensures that they are confident about their responsibilities in keeping pupils safe. Governors and leaders carry out a rigorous audit of safeguarding procedures and documentation annually, from which they identify any ways in which arrangements can be improved even further.

Parents are rightly confident in the school's work to care for pupils and ensure that they are safe. Pupils are adamant that they are very well cared for and very safe. They learn about road and fire safety, stranger danger and internet safety. Pupils also learn about managing risk through their Forest School lessons.

Inspection findings

- You and other leaders, including governors, have a good understanding of the school's strengths and areas that need further improvement. You know exactly what actions you need to take.
- Governors carry out a rigorous programme of monitoring the school's work. They understand their role well and hold you to account by asking you to provide a range of information about pupils' achievement.
- You have rightly restructured the leadership team so that the school is not dependent upon all improvements being driven by you. The deputy headteacher provides effective support in checking learning and improving teaching. The recent appointment of leaders for English and mathematics is positive but they are very new in post. Training is being provided by the local authority to ensure that they have the necessary skills to carry out their roles.
- You work effectively with a group of local schools to challenge each other and share good practice. The new method of assessment, which is being developed with other schools, is helping teachers to be clear about how to show progress in learning.
- Achievement in reading is improving swiftly, because you have strengthened teaching. It was delightful to see Year 6 pupils working confidently on the text of *Romeo and Juliet*, making suggestions as to how Romeo might have felt at each stage of the story. Standards in writing and mathematics are also rising, although pupils need more opportunities to practise their skills to secure equally rapid progress in these subjects.
- Children in the early years have settled very well and are making good progress. Effective two-way communication between home and school supports their learning well. Children work with purpose, demonstrating very good skills and independence. I observed four boys working in 'Santa's grotto' to wrap presents. They were adept at cutting sticky tape (without tangling it) and wrote appropriate labels, working cooperatively alongside each other, sharing paper and scissors, to each complete their own tasks.
- Pupils reflect effectively on their learning. They feed back whether they understand the activity and how useful they found it. This is encouraged from an early age, and developed to a sophisticated level as pupils move up through the school. Teachers respond to pupils' comments and assess their learning effectively.
- The local authority provides useful support. The lead learning partner provides accurate and helpful reports which confirm the school's priorities and offer challenge to improve further. The subject leader training for the newly appointed leaders is at an early stage but is set to continue next year.

- You set relevant targets for teachers, which sensibly link to pupils' progress. However, the targets are not always aspirational enough. Governors' involvement in performance management is robust. They check the targets set and review whether they have been achieved in order to make decisions about pay. They have rigorous discussions which ensure that teachers and leaders are held to account.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should:

- further raise expectations of what can be achieved, by setting more aspirational targets for pupils and teachers
- improve achievement further in writing and mathematics, ensuring that pupils across the school have opportunities to practise their skills
- ensure that all pupils manage their behaviour well, especially outside lessons.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Education for the Diocese of Portsmouth (CE) and the Director of Children's Services for Hampshire County Council. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Louise Adams
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you, the deputy headteacher, teachers, pupils and four governors, including the Chair of the Governing Body. I spoke to a representative from Hampshire local authority by telephone. With you, I observed teaching in each class and we were joined by the deputy headteacher to scrutinise pupils' books. I observed pupils' behaviour at break time and around the school. I spoke to a number of parents at the beginning of the school day and considered the responses of 24 parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. I analysed a range of documentation, including the school's self-evaluation, school improvement plan, information about pupils' progress and safeguarding checks, policies and procedures. I also took into account six responses to the staff questionnaire.