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9 July 2019

Mrs Lou Romans
Headteacher
Steep Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School
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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 25 June 2019, 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 December 2015.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. In recent times, there has been a substantial number of staffing changes. You have managed this period well, ensuring that pupils' learning has not been affected. You provide strong leadership and articulate your vision clearly. This motivates staff and ensures that the school continues to improve. Governors share your high aspirations for pupils and drive for improvement. Governors have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses and provide leaders with effective challenge and guidance.

Pupils are happy at school and describe their learning as 'fun'. They enjoy working collaboratively to solve problems and complete the tasks set. Pupils behave positively in class and apply themselves well to their learning. They talk with enthusiasm about the curriculum, particularly their topic work. One pupil told me that they had especially valued their trip to a theme park, which was linked to their 'forces' topic. Others talked about their enjoyment of their visit to the 'living rainforest', where they saw a sloth, iguanas and butterflies. Pupils are kind and courteous towards each other, adults in school and visitors. During my discussions with pupils, they told me that they were 'all friends' who 'looked after each other'.

Parents and carers are extremely positive about the school. Those I spoke to praised the teachers, particularly the level of care they give to the children. One parent commented, 'Children and parents are listened to and valued, resulting in an

engaging culture of mutual respect.' All parents who completed Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, said that their children are well looked after at school and make good progress. The vast majority said that they would recommend the school to others.

At the last inspection, you were asked to further strengthen the quality of writing and mathematics by giving pupils opportunities to practise their skills. During the inspection, I observed pupils across the school writing at length and drawing upon their existing knowledge and skills with confidence. We scrutinised a range of pupils' mathematics books. This scrutiny showed that pupils are regularly given opportunities to develop their calculation fluency and apply their mathematical understanding to solve problems and explain their reasoning. You were also asked to ensure that pupils manage their behaviour well. In my discussions with pupils, they said that behaviour in school is good. They told me that teachers are always quick to make sure that pupils follow the school's rules. The vast majority of parents who completed the Parent View questionnaire said that the school ensures that pupils behave well.

You and your leadership team have a clear understanding of the school's many strengths, which include the wide range of enriching experiences that enhance the curriculum for pupils. These contribute to pupils' high standards of achievement in English by the end of Year 6. However, you are not complacent. You are currently working to improve the teaching of phonics in the early years and key stage 1. This work is already having a positive impact on pupils' understanding and skills in phonics. You have also identified that mathematics in key stage 2 needs to be developed further.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that safeguarding arrangements are effective and the culture of safeguarding is strong. You lead annual training for staff, which is updated in response to all current regulation and guidance. As a result, all staff have a clear understanding of how to identify and report concerns. The designated safeguarding lead responds quickly if a concern is raised so that pupils receive effective, timely support.

Governors also undertake annual safeguarding training. They fully understand the importance of keeping pupils safe and take their responsibilities seriously. The safeguarding governor routinely checks the school's vetting and recruitment procedures for staff and volunteers.

Pupils say that they feel safe in school. They talk about the many ways they are taught to keep themselves safe, for example through their learning about fire safety, online safety and 'stranger danger'. One parent commented, 'The excellent pastoral care provided by school staff means that children feel safe and secure in school.'

Inspection findings

- In recent years, you have worked effectively with your staff to develop the quality of teaching in English across the school. Much improvement is evident. In the 2018 end of key stage 2 tests, all Year 6 pupils achieved the expected standard in reading. This is 25% above the national average. In addition, a larger proportion of pupils attained the higher standard in reading, compared to other schools. While Year 6 pupils achieved very well in writing in 2018, smaller proportions of pupils achieved or exceeded the expected standard. During the inspection, we jointly observed the teaching of writing. Pupils can write confidently in a range of genres. Their writing included the language features appropriate to the task and they used their extensive vocabulary to make their work more interesting. Mostly, pupils' spelling was accurate. Sometimes, teachers did not challenge pupils sufficiently, which resulted in some pupils' progress not being as strong as it could be. Nevertheless, the majority of pupils make good progress from their starting points in writing and achieve well.
- In 2018, at the end of key stage 2, a smaller proportion of pupils achieved or exceeded the expected standard in mathematics compared to the national averages. You acknowledge that the teaching of mathematics needs to improve and have rightly prioritised this as an area for development. While much work has been started to address this area of relative weakness, it is too early to see the impact on the quality of teaching and learning in mathematics. Teachers' planning is not yet consistently ensuring that the needs of all pupils are met. Consequently, some pupils do not make strong enough progress. This is particularly the case for the most able pupils and for those who require more support with mathematics.
- From our joint observations of the teaching of phonics and early writing, it was clear that improvements have been made. Some pupils are able to write and spell complicated words accurately, applying their knowledge of phonics with skill and confidence. However, teachers do not always ensure that the most able pupils are challenged sufficiently. As a result, these pupils are not consistently making the strong progress that they are capable of. You are right to continue to focus on securing improvements in the teaching of phonics in the early years and key stage 1.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- larger proportions of pupils achieve the expected and higher standards in mathematics at the end of key stage 2
- the most able pupils are challenged sufficiently in the development of their phonics and spelling skills.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the director of education for the Diocese of Portsmouth (ce), the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Hampshire. This letter will be published on the

Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Luisa Gould
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

I discussed the key lines of enquiry with you and your special educational needs coordinator. We discussed: the school's assessment information on the attainment and progress of current pupils; your plans for improvement; and your evaluation of the school's effectiveness. I met with a group of governors and had a telephone conversation with a representative of the local authority.

Together, we observed learning in all classes. We scrutinised a range of pupils' mathematics workbooks. I considered 37 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including 26 free-text comments. I analysed a range of the school's documentation, including policies, procedures, and the minutes of the governing body's meetings. I met with your senior administration officer to review the school's safer recruitment practice and checked safeguarding policies and procedures.