

Steep Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School

Inspection report

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|--------------------------------|-----------------|
| Unique Reference Number | 116319 |
| Local Authority | Hampshire |
| Inspection number | 290499 |
| Inspection dates | 19–20 June 2007 |
| Reporting inspector | Mike Thompson |

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

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| Type of school | Primary |
| School category | Voluntary controlled |
| Age range of pupils | 4–11 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number on roll | 104 |
| School | |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Mr Rollo Wicksteed |
| Headteacher | Mrs Angela Morrow |
| Date of previous school inspection | 4 June 2001 |
| School address | 95 Church Road Steep Petersfield GU32 2DE |
| Telephone number | 01730 263988 |
| Fax number | 01730 233738 |

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

Steep CE Primary is a small rural school, in an attractive setting two miles to the north of Petersfield. Almost all pupils are of White British heritage, and are generally from advantaged home circumstances. Almost all teachers, including the headteacher, have been appointed within the past three years.

Key for inspection grades

| | |
|---------|--------------|
| Grade 1 | Outstanding |
| Grade 2 | Good |
| Grade 3 | Satisfactory |
| Grade 4 | Inadequate |

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 4

The quality of provision and the standards attained at Steep CE Primary have declined since the last inspection. At present, the school does not provide its pupils with an acceptable standard of education, and therefore its effectiveness is judged to be inadequate. The headteacher became very quickly aware of this situation following her appointment in September 2006, and took clear and decisive action to address the situation. This includes a programme of intensive support from the local authority. The school is now improving as the impact of the actions is starting to be seen. However, there is still much to do. The school recognises the need to develop a clear management structure and to improve the leadership skills of teaching staff. The school has a satisfactory capacity to improve further.

There are a number of significant weaknesses in the educational provision for the pupils. Teachers in Key Stage 2 are not good enough at assessing their pupils' needs and using the information to plan their lessons. Consequently, work is not always pitched at the right level. In the curriculum, there is a lack of focus on the step-by-step development of pupils' skills throughout the school, although there have already been improvements since the arrival of the current headteacher. The quality of academic guidance is weak. The targets set for pupils lack precision and, particularly in Years 5 and 6, the marking of pupils' work is unsatisfactory. The result of these wide-ranging inadequacies is that pupils' achievement is unsatisfactory and their progress is generally too slow.

A high proportion of the parents returned the inspection questionnaires, and these were generally positive in all areas surveyed. However, some parents commented on the lack of challenging work provided for their children. Others acknowledged the improvements now being made when noting, for example, 'Steep School has been through a few unsettling years, with two changes of headteacher. However we have been very impressed with the new headteacher, who shows great enthusiasm and a determination to take the school to new heights.'

Children are given a satisfactory start to their education in the Reception class. The school is working to improve its provision for outdoor learning since current arrangements do not enable the easy transition from indoor to outdoor work that is a requirement of the provision for the Foundation Stage.

On admission to the Reception class, children's attainment is generally well above what is normally expected of four year-olds. Children make satisfactory progress, and by the time they transfer to Year 1, standards are still well above average. Standards remain at this level at the end of Year 2, representing satisfactory progress throughout this key stage. However, progress slows in Key Stage 2, and is inadequate. By the time pupils leave at the end of Year 6, standards are lower than they should be, although usually above average overall. In most cases, pupils fail to reach their true potential.

The standards of pupils' personal development and well-being are satisfactory. Although some parents expressed concerns about the standards of behaviour, pupils generally behave well.

For a number of years governors failed to ensure that they monitored the performance of the school with sufficient rigour. They now understand the task in hand and are working closely with the headteacher to bring about the necessary improvements.

In accordance with section 13(3) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement, because it is performing significantly less well than in all the circumstances it could reasonably be expected to perform. The school is therefore given a Notice to Improve. Significant improvement is required in relation to the achievement and progress of the pupils in Key Stage 2, the quality of teaching in Key Stage 2, the curriculum, and the academic guidance and support given to pupils.

What the school should do to improve further

- Make significant improvements to the quality of teaching and learning in Key Stage 2. Ensure that teachers provide achievable challenges to pupils of all levels of attainment.
- Ensure that the curriculum provides for the progressive development of pupils' skills.
- Ensure that teachers provide clear academic guidance for their pupils through good quality marking of work and by setting precise targets for them to achieve.
- Develop the leadership and management skills of all teachers. In particular, ensure that they are involved in raising standards through the rigorous monitoring of pupils' achievement and progress.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 4

Achievement overall is inadequate, even though standards are usually above average. Standards are well above average by the end of the Reception year. Children's attainment is at least above average in all areas of learning, and is well above average in most. Children are very well equipped for Key Stage 1 because they have particularly good social skills, and much better skills in reading, writing and basic calculation than most children of their age. In Key Stage 1, the school builds satisfactorily on this very good platform of attainment. Overall, standards are well above average in reading and writing and above average in mathematics. Pupils make satisfactory progress in the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 because the quality of teaching is satisfactory overall.

In Key Stage 2, pupils do not achieve their potential because teaching is inadequate and the academic guidance provided for them is not good enough. Standards in 2006 were below the national average in English and science and well below average in mathematics. The school's performance in the national tests for Year 6 pupils in 2007 is much better, but pupils' achievement remains inadequate because this higher level of performance does not reflect their true potential.

Pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities make satisfactory progress because of the extra help that they are given in lessons by teaching assistants. This means that, even when work is not pitched at the right level for them, the assistants compensate for this.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Pupils' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is satisfactory. Pupils' moral and social development is good, and their spiritual development is satisfactory. Their cultural development is inadequate. Pupils are good at celebrating their own cultural traditions, but have much less awareness of the rich diversity of non-western customs within our society.

Most pupils enjoy being at school, and those interviewed gave a wide range of reasons to support their positive views. This enjoyment is reflected in the above average rate of attendance. However, some pupils in Key Stage 2 are critical and say, for example, that they would like to be given more challenging work. Pupils also show a responsibility towards the wider community. For instance, they raise significant sums of money for a wide range of charities such as World Vision and Great Ormond Street Hospital. Pupils have a satisfactory awareness of how to keep safe and lead healthy lifestyles. Despite pupils' inadequate achievement, their good levels of competence in basic skills and their ability to work both cooperatively and independently mean that they are satisfactorily prepared for the next phase of their education and for a future as life-long learners.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 4

The school correctly judges teaching and learning to be inadequate overall. However, there is a marked contrast between the quality of teaching in the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1, and that in Key Stage 2. In the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1, teaching is at least satisfactory and is sometimes good. In Key Stage 2, teaching is satisfactory at best and is too often inadequate.

Lessons in all classes are generally calm and orderly because pupils respond well to teachers' clear expectations of their behaviour. Pupils are generally keen to learn, and show good levels of concentration and perseverance.

The key weakness in teaching in Key Stage 2 is that, in far too many lessons, the level of challenge is wrong. This occurs because teachers do not make enough use of information from previous assessments to plan pupils' work. Consequently, it is not pitched at different levels of difficulty in order to meet the needs of all pupils. This situation is compounded by inaccuracies in teachers' assessments of their pupils' capabilities. As a result, work is often either too easy or too difficult for many pupils.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 4

The curriculum is inadequate because of several major shortcomings. The planning in Key Stage 2 does not take account of the wide range of attainment within the mixed-age classes. In English lessons, for example, pupils are often given the same tasks, regardless of age. Planning for mathematics is similarly flawed. In other subjects, teachers in both key stages do not have clear enough guidance about the levels of skills to be expected for pupils of different ages. In art, for example, the impact of good teaching in Years 1 and 2 was lessened by lack of guidance for the teacher as to precisely what she ought to expect each of the different age groups to achieve. The school is fully aware of this issue. It has already made significant progress this year by ensuring that there is curriculum planning in place in all subjects.

The curriculum in the Foundation Stage is satisfactory. Despite the challenges presented by sharing a large room with the Key Stage 1 class, and the lack of easy access to a suitable outdoor area, the school ensures that all areas of learning are covered. There is a reasonable balance between activities directed by adults and those chosen by the children.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 4

Child protection systems and risk assessments are in place and are effective. Consequently, pupils feel safe and secure in school. Satisfactory relationships with outside agencies help promote pupils' welfare. However, because the academic guidance and support given to pupils is weak, the quality of care, guidance and support is inadequate overall. Pupils' progress is now being tracked, but the systems put in place to do this are fairly new and, as the school recognises, do not yet enable best use to be made of the data collected. All pupils have targets to achieve, but many of these are too vague to enable objective judgments to be made as to how well the pupils have achieved them. In some cases, pupils do not understand their targets, because the wording is not pitched at an accessible reading level. In Years 5 and 6, written comments in pupils' books do not always give the pupils enough guidance about precisely what they need to do to improve their work.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The new headteacher is fully aware of the magnitude of her task in tackling the underachievement in this school, and has produced a clear outline of the action required. Through her good and determined leadership there is now clear evidence of improvements in the rates of progress made by pupils, for instance in mathematics, which has been a key area of focus this year. At present, the management provided by the subject leaders is not good enough. This is because teachers do not have the necessary leadership and management skills. There are some pockets of emerging good practice, for example in the satisfactory leadership provided in mathematics.

Governance is satisfactory. The governors are extremely supportive, and many visit the school regularly. The chair of governors acknowledges that, in previous years the governors did not monitor the performance of the school with enough rigour, and did not look beyond the school's consistently good results in the tests at the end of Key Stage 2. Governors now understand that the older pupils have not been achieving as well as they should for a number of years, as the consequence of this is now being seen in lower levels of performance at the end of Key Stage 2. A rigorous programme of support has now been agreed with the local authority, and governors are looking very closely at the school's performance.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Annex A

Inspection judgements

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| <i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i> | School Overall |
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Overall effectiveness

| | |
|--|----|
| How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners? | 4 |
| How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being? | 2 |
| The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage | 3 |
| The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation | 2 |
| The capacity to make any necessary improvements | 3 |
| Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection | No |

Achievement and standards

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|--|---|
| How well do learners achieve? | 4 |
| The standards ¹ reached by learners | 2 |
| How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners | 4 |
| How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress | 3 |

Personal development and well-being

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|---|---|
| How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners? | 3 |
| The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development | 3 |
| The behaviour of learners | 2 |
| The attendance of learners | 2 |
| How well learners enjoy their education | 2 |
| The extent to which learners adopt safe practices | 3 |
| The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles | 3 |
| The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community | 2 |
| How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being | 3 |

The quality of provision

| | |
|---|---|
| How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs? | 4 |
| How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners? | 4 |
| How well are learners cared for, guided and supported? | 4 |

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Annex A

Leadership and management

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| How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners? | 3 |
| How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education | 3 |
| How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets | 3 |
| How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can | 4 |
| How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money | 4 |
| The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities | 3 |
| Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements? | Yes |
| Does this school require special measures? | No |
| Does this school require a notice to improve? | Yes |

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

17 July 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Steep Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School, Petersfield, GU32 2DE

Thank you for being so helpful when I came to inspect your school. I would like to tell you what we think about how well you are getting on and how well your school is helping you to learn.

There are a number of things that I like about your school. First I think that you are really lucky to have such a lovely place to learn in. I think that all of the adults in the school take good care of you, and many of you told me how safe and happy you feel. You behave well and work well with one another. I'm sure that you know that the standard of your work is often better than in many schools, and this is because you are bright and keen to learn.

However, there are lots of things that your school needs to improve. Some of you told me that you find your work too easy, especially in Years 3 to 6. I agree, and think that your teachers in these classes need to plan carefully to make sure that the work they give you really makes you think hard, but is achievable with a bit of effort. I also want all your teachers to plan lessons so that people in different age groups have different work to do. This will make sure that the oldest people in each class will get more advanced work to do. I'm sure that you are ready for the challenge! I have asked your teachers to set very clear targets for you to reach. I would also like them to mark your work more carefully so that you know exactly what you need to do to make it even better. This is especially important in Years 5 and 6. Finally, I would like all your teachers to learn about how to be in charge of different subjects. This will help your headteacher, because she already has a lot to do. You told me that you like your new headteacher, and I know that your parents think that she is doing a good job. I agree. She had already worked out the same list of things for the school to do as I found during my visit!

As you can tell from the list of things to do, your school did not do well in its inspection, and it needs some extra help to make sure it improves quickly. I would like you all to work with your teachers to help turn yours into a really good school.

Yours sincerely,

Mike Thompson

Lead inspector