



Stepgates Community School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 125122
Local Authority Surrey
Inspection number 293200
Inspection dates 16–17 October 2006
Reporting inspector Andrew Lyons

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Stepgates
School category	Community		Chertsey
Age range of pupils	5–11		KT16 8HT
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01932 563022
Number on roll (school)	199	Fax number	01932 571812
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mr David Endersby
		Headteacher	Mrs Gillian Ward
Date of previous school inspection	12 March 2001		

Age group 5–11	Inspection dates 16–17 October 2006	Inspection number 293200
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Stepgates Community is an average sized school welcoming pupils from a variety of social backgrounds. As part of its provision it has a Language Resource Centre that serves North West Surrey for pupils holding statements of special educational needs. Overall a high proportion of pupils have learning difficulties and an above average number hold statements of special educational needs. The number of pupils having free school meals is above average. A significant proportion of pupils joins and leaves the school throughout the school year, especially in Years 2, 4 and 6. Attendance is well below national average and the number of authorised absences is nearly twice the national average.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Stepgates Community Primary School is a caring school with positive relationships. The school has faced complex staffing difficulties in the past, but for the first time in recent years the school is fully staffed with permanent teachers and a settled senior management team. The current Headteacher, well supported by her deputy, governors and the Local Authority, is enabling the school to develop effectively. All staff are working as a team to support school improvement. The quality of leadership and management and the capacity to improve are satisfactory. Middle managers are contributing more effectively to improvements. All of the adults in the school are working enthusiastically and with common purpose to make the school better. As one of the parents wrote 'I feel that everyone at the school seems to be trying hard to make Stepgates a better school'. Standards dropped significantly in 2005 but returned to their previous level in 2006.

The school judges itself to be satisfactory overall. This evaluation is accurate. Teaching and learning are now consistently satisfactory and an increasing amount is good because of more effective methods of classroom management and matching work more closely to pupils' needs. Marking has improved so that pupils know how well they are doing. Assessing work has become more accurate so that pupils' progress can be better identified both short and long term. Because of this, the information can be more readily shared with children so that they can be set realistic targets. Teachers too often accept short answers to questions and often pupils need more stimuli to speak in longer sentences. This would develop writing skills and raise standards. Pupils make satisfactory progress, although higher ability pupils still lack sufficient challenge and could do better. Achievement overall is satisfactory. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress. Provision in the Foundation Stage is good because children are making strong gains in their personal and social development. Standards overall are below average.

The school's capacity to improve is evident in the improvement in pupils' behaviour and attitudes. The good working relationships between both teaching and support staff, pupils, outside agencies and parents have aided these improvements. There has been a reduction in exclusions and incidents of bad behaviour. There is good provision in the resource centre for language development, as well as in class, and the school is particularly adept at developing the language skills of pupils holding statements of special educational need. Outside specialists support the work of the centre and many pupils remain in the school as part of the main provision. Attendance is well below the national average, and although the school has taken steps to improve this, only ninety percent of pupils attend every day. Regular study ensures pupils reach their capacity for learning, and missed days put pupils further behind.

The curriculum is improving but the variety of teaching and learning styles is narrow with opportunities for practical learning activities being rare. Pupils value the range of clubs and sports, which help them to become fitter and healthier. The school also offers visits and residential experience that add positively to pupils' experiences.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards and achievement through developing pupils' speaking skills.
- Encourage parents to ensure that their children more regularly attend school.
- Broaden the curriculum to provide more practical activities to make learning more stimulating.
- Plan and develop more work that challenges the most able learners.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Standards dipped in 2005 compared to the previous two years, but have risen again in 2006. Standards are below average in English, mathematics and science by the end of Year 6. On entry to the school, pupils' skills and knowledge are lower than expected for their age but progress in the Foundation Stage is good, giving a strong start to their education. At the end of Year 2 standards are still below average but pupils' achievement is satisfactory. Overall, progress is satisfactory. Pupils with learning difficulties achieve well, but the most able pupils are not doing well enough.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' personal development and well being are good, as is their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Pupils understand why rules are needed and behave well. They are considerate to each other and courteous to staff and visitors. Pupils say that the school is a place where people get on well together. Attendance is unsatisfactory because a minority of pupils do not come to school regularly enough. When pupils are in school though, they show that they enjoy learning by their enthusiastic willingness to be involved in lessons and to volunteer for other activities. Pupils' skills in literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) are improving which develops their economic well being.

Pupils report that they get good advice on how to be safe and healthy. In a conversation, a group used the term 'a balanced diet'. They were able to explain what this means and why it is important. They like the way that the school provides equipment such as skipping ropes at playtimes and are proud that the idea for a 'trim-trail' came from the school council. Pupils make a good contribution to the life of the school. Those on the school council take their responsibilities seriously and make sure that they ask their classmates for their ideas and opinions. Older pupils are very clear that they have responsibility for setting good examples to the younger ones and helping them to settle into the school. Pupils support charity appeals well. A group described how they enjoyed collecting 'coppers for kids', explaining that this helped children in Kenya. Opportunities for them to learn about other cultures are limited, but pupils make good use of these when they do occur. They showed this when talking knowledgeably about Muslim festivals.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The school considers its teaching to be satisfactory and inspectors agree. Some good teaching was seen. Parents commented on the commitment of staff. One wrote 'I am happy with teachers, who take time to look at children's homework each day, which encourages them to do more'. There has been a particular focus on developing pupils' skills in literacy and numeracy but more could be done to encourage pupils to express their thoughts and ideas verbally in lessons. This would form a better basis for extended writing. Teachers have suitable subject knowledge, but the use of practical apparatus and resources to bring learning alive, is too limited. The marking of pupils' work is now good and better assessment aids learning. This is starting to raise standards. However, the more able need to be challenged. Planning of work for pupils with learning difficulties is good. Learning in the unit is sometimes outstanding for pupils in Years 3 and 4, because teaching succeeds extremely well in exciting pupils and giving them the confidence and motivation to try hard. When adults work closely with small groups of pupils, pupils learn well because they are effectively encouraged to concentrate and try hard.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum is now more relevant to all pupils' needs with an emphasis on developing literacy and numeracy skills. For many pupils these are areas where they are well behind. Results in the Key Stage 2 national tests improved because of a more accurate focus on where pupils' were and how to get better. Provision for pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities is well organised and effective. Effective co-ordination in all subjects is improving provision across the school, although there is much to do to make it consistent in every classroom. ICT is becoming an important tool for learning. Every teaching room is equipped with an interactive whiteboard and pupils enjoy the new well-equipped ICT room. Pupils do not develop their designing and problem solving skills enough because practical and creative activities are given too little time. Pupils commented that they enjoy the range of extra clubs and visits. Year 6 pupils are excited to be going on their residential trip at the end of the inspection week.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The school provides good care, academic guidance and support for its pupils. Procedures for child protection and to ensure safety are very clear. The school diligently keeps records to ensure that safety checks are fully carried out and up to date. Several staff members have been trained in first aid. The school works effectively with outside agencies to ensure that groups, such as pupils from the Traveller community, are well provided for. Effective guidance on how to behave and be safe and healthy contributes

to pupils' good personal development. During the last two years the school has improved its systems for tracking each pupil's progress. Computer records make access easy for all staff who need to use them. Because the improvements are quite recent, information is not yet fully complete for all pupils but provide a good basis for setting appropriate targets for every pupil and checking that suitable progress is made.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory, with good features. The headteacher has a good understanding of the school's strengths and areas in which it needs to improve and is moving it forward well. School self-evaluation is satisfactory. The previous instability in staffing and leadership has been resolved. The leadership team shares the headteacher's vision and staff morale and commitment are good. Provision in the language unit is generally good, but is not fully consistent. Governors are providing sound support and challenge to the school. The school makes good use of its links with outside agencies. These help it to effectively meet the needs of groups of pupils and to provide good training for staff and governors.

The school has set up rigorous systems for monitoring its performance and planning improvements. It has an organised system for monitoring teaching and learning through observing lessons and guiding teachers on how they can improve. Subject co-ordinators are being trained to become more involved in observing colleagues. The school gains an accurate view of its quality and performance through surveying the views of parents and the school council. Improvement is beginning to be seen and this is clearly an improving school. However, most developments are still at an early stage, so the capacity for further improvement is currently satisfactory.

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Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	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?	3
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The behaviour of learners	2
The attendance of learners	4
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
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?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2

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.

Leadership and management

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	2
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	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3
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?	No

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Thank you so much for helping us during the inspection and for being so kind and friendly. We thought the way that you opened doors for us, talked to us and guided us showed you and your school at its best. We are writing to let you know our findings.

You behave well, particularly when you walked through the town to the church for Harvest Festival and your teachers looked after you and kept you safe. We think that you are well cared for and you agree. You all joined in and were proud when you showed your work and performed. Your parents, teachers and everyone were proud of you.

We think the school has been through a difficult time and is now getting better. Children did much better last year than the year before. We are pleased that the school has got regular teachers and all of the adults in your school are working enthusiastically to make the school better and better.

The inspectors have asked the school to help you to make even more progress by doing these important things:

- we think you should be helped to practise your speaking skills
- we would encourage you to attend every day, and on time, so that you can learn as much as you can
- we think that you need more practical activities to make learning more interesting
- some of you need harder work, especially for those of you who find learning easy, so we have asked for that too.

We wish you all well, so work hard to help your teachers make learning fun and successful. In this way you will be able to learn important skills that will help you to achieve well.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Lyons

Lead Inspector