

Steep Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	116319
Local Authority	Hampshire
Inspection number	319472
Inspection dates	30 June –1 July 2008
Reporting inspector	Hugh Protherough

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	89
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Margaret Scott
Headteacher	Mrs Angela Morrow
Date of previous school inspection	19 June 2007
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

This small village school is situated close to the town of Petersfield. About a third of pupils attending the school are from the local rural community, the remainder come from further afield. The overwhelming majority of pupils are of White British heritage and very few speak English as an additional language. Almost all the teachers, including the headteacher have been appointed in the past three years. The school was awarded a Sports Activemark in February 2008.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

'The improvements in the school are palpable. It now feels as though there is a cohesive approach to teaching...the school is definitely on the way back up...' The overwhelming majority share the views of this parent, as well as staff, governors and pupils. They are fully endorsed by the inspector.

In accordance with Section 13 (5) of the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that the school no longer requires significant improvement.

Over the past year, the school has taken giant strides towards addressing the concerns raised in the previous inspection report. The good leadership of the headteacher reported previously has been enhanced by the creation of a new staff team. Together with the highly effective support of the Local Authority they have improved the quality of teaching, learning and curriculum. As a result, pupils' progress has accelerated and much of the previous lost ground made up.

Throughout the school, pupils of all abilities are achieving well. This year's unvalidated Year 2 assessments show an overall improvement on those for 2007, particularly in reading. The overall levels of attainment in the current Year 6 are similar to those of 2007. However, when compared to their starting points as seven-year-olds this year's cohort have made good progress. Almost all pupils are attaining the levels expected of eleven-year-olds and around a half are exceeding these, some comfortably so.

Inadequate teaching has been eliminated. The teachers have developed well-considered frameworks to support their planning. These ensure a far more systematic approach to the teaching of English and mathematics. There is a better match of task to the wide range of pupil ability within each class and the level of challenge, as pupils said to the inspector, is 'just right'. Pupils have been enthused by the exciting activities and events that have enriched their curriculum such as dance afternoons and arts days. Although good levels of literacy have been a feature of the school's performance for many years, there have been insufficient opportunities for pupils to develop their writing skills in subjects such as science and the humanities. The introduction of 'Best Books' for pupils to write-up stories and accounts for assessment offers powerful evidence of their good progress. However, it also raises the question why the neatness and quality of presentation in these books is not seen more consistently in their day-to-day work.

Pupils enjoy school and their personal development is good. They eat healthily and exercise enthusiastically. They feel safe in school and have very positive attitudes to learning. Improvements in the quality of guidance provided to pupils through marking and pertinent targets set by staff mean that overall care, guidance and support are good.

Since her arrival two years ago, the headteacher has provided excellent leadership for the school community. She was fearless in her identification of the school's underperformance and set out a clear agenda to improve things. She consulted wisely with Local Authority to access the necessary help and guidance, encouraged governors to improve the quality of their support and challenge and exercised patience in building a new staff team. This team has made a good start to developing their roles as managers. They have rightly focused on improving planning and assessing its impact on the quality of pupils' work. However, they have not had opportunity to monitor the quality of teaching across the school.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

The profile of attainment of children entering the Reception class each September is mixed, but generally above average. However, there has been a wider spectrum of ability in the past two years including a higher proportion of children with learning difficulties and weaker attainment in communication, language and literacy and mathematics. Three quarters of the current Reception class are operating within the learning goals expected of five-year-olds.

The children are well taught and benefit from a good mix of teacher led and self-initiated activities. Adults are careful to ensure the children make the most of both indoor and outdoor areas and have improved this aspect of provision. The teacher is sensibly preparing children for more formal learning and most children cope well with this. Opportunities such as the short 'Multi-skills' sessions offer good opportunity for pupils to exercise together and teachers to assess their movement and co-ordination. Occasionally a 'lesson' requiring children to sit and listen can go on for too long and then lower attainers find it difficult to sustain interest.

The new teacher continues to make effective use of the Foundation Stage Profile to record the progress of each child every half-term. However, arrangements for the recording and collation of the small day-to-day achievements made by children are not yet fully effective.

What the school should do to improve further

- Increase opportunities for pupils to apply their writing skills across all the subjects of the National Curriculum.
- Insist that pupils take care to present a greater proportion of their work as neatly and attractively as their best.
- Extend the work of subject and phase leaders to include opportunities to monitor teaching across the school.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

The Year 6 pupils taking national tests in 2007 attained above average standards, but underachieved in relation to their starting points. The achievement of pupils currently in Year 6 has improved markedly over the past twelve months and is now good. The inspector's analysis of their work shows that nearly all pupils are working at the levels expected of eleven-year-olds and almost half are exceeding them. This group of pupils performed considerably less well in their Year 2 assessments than last year's group, yet their current attainment levels as Year 6 are similar to their predecessors. Their current work shows good gains in attainment since the time they were seven and reflects the considerable impact of improved teaching on progress.

The downward trend in teachers' assessments of Year 2 pupils has been halted. The current group of pupils has made good progress this year. All are working towards the upper end of the levels expected of seven year-olds in reading, writing and mathematics and a few are exceeding these.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils are enthusiastic about their school and all it has to offer them. The school council is a well-managed forum for children of all ages to contribute their views and make suggestions

for improvements, such as new goal posts or the quality of library books. Attendance is above average and pupils are seldom late. Pupils' moral and social development continues to be good. Behaviour in and around the school is considerate and pupils offer a polite and courteous welcome to visitors. The school's recent work in the arts has started to improve pupils' awareness of other cultures and their spiritual development is also good. Pupils understand the importance of eating healthily and staying fit. In addition to the after-school sports clubs, the inspector noted the large numbers of pupils playing football at lunchtime and the many who cycle to and from school with their parents. Older pupils are currently designing their own 'healthy menus' and many of those who ate lunch with the inspector spoke sensibly about the importance of a balanced diet. By the time they leave the school most are confident conversationalists whose good basic skills equip them well for the next stage of education and beyond.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The quality and consistency of teaching has improved considerably over the past year. In all classes, there is a far better match of task to pupils' abilities, especially in English and mathematics. This is because teachers know their pupils well, assess accurately and make good use of this information when planning lessons. The extent of this knowledge becomes evident when teachers question the pupils. Each enquiry is pitched at a level appropriate to the ability of the pupil and frequently relates to an individual's learning targets. When pupils are successful, teachers are swift to praise and this further reinforces the highly positive relationships throughout the school.

The marking of pupils' work has improved. For instance, the careful annotation of pupils' work in Years 1 and 2 supports a compelling picture of pupils' progress. Similarly the assessment of pupils' work in 'Best Books' contains detailed feedback and clear advice on the next steps to further improvement. However, whilst pupils present their work well in these books, the presentation of work in exercise books is erratic. Teachers' expectations of presentation are not yet consistent across the school.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The school's curriculum is on a firmer footing than a year ago and successfully meets the needs of all pupils. The planning for English and mathematics now maps progression in pupils' learning as they move through the school. For instance, in the course of a morning the inspector was able to witness Reception class children learning about the properties of simple two-dimensional shapes, Year 2 pupils mastering the use of a protractor, whilst those in Year 4 measured angles precisely and described them correctly as acute, obtuse or reflex.

A wide variety of visits and visitors to school enhances considerably the quality of education provided. Pupils are pleased by the way that the school's outdoor environment is incorporated within their learning; constructing art from natural artefacts or building a shelter in the woods. Cross-curricular links in pupils' learning are steadily being established. The teachers recognise the importance of this, but as yet there are insufficient opportunities for pupils to apply their well-developed literacy skills in writing more extendedly in subjects such as science, history and geography.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Parents and children are all agreed that one of the main reasons why Steep is a good place to be educated in is because pupils feel safe, happy and secure. Levels of pastoral care continue to be good and arrangements for safeguarding pupils are secure. The key improvement since the last inspection has been the development of academic guidance. The marking of pupils' work is much improved. By Years 5 and 6 most pupils check independently what the teacher has written and correct their work accordingly. All pupils now have personal learning targets in English and mathematics. They understand these and can show visitors the progress they have made over the year.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The issues raised by the previous inspection were of no surprise to the headteacher and Local Authority. They had already started work to address the weaknesses identified in the report and over the past year have successfully helped the school to move forward strongly. Governors are clear that previously they had not held the staff sufficiently to account for the school's performance. They have worked tirelessly to improve; attending courses and putting into practice what they have learnt. As a result, they have a much better oversight of the school. The virtually unanimous satisfaction levels expressed through the parent questionnaires are testament to the burgeoning partnership between homes and school and confidence in school leadership.

The new staff team has embraced the opportunity to accept management responsibilities. They have rightly focused on establishing better planning and regular checks on the quality of work in pupils' books. The headteacher assures the quality of teaching across the school, but subject leaders have not yet had opportunity to develop this aspect of their role.

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Annex A

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?	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
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 extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	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	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
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.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2
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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
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	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
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

Annex B

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

11 July 2008

Dear Pupils

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

Thank you very much for welcoming me to your school. Last year my colleague Mr Thompson wrote to you to tell you that your school needed some extra help to make sure it improved and gave you a better education. He asked you to help.

I came back to check how things were going and was delighted by what I found. It is clear that everyone, you included, has been working very hard. None of the good things Mr Thompson saw has altered. You are still very well behaved and produce work of a standard much better than in many schools. However, whilst last year some of you were complaining that some work was too easy, this year, most of you are saying that it is 'just right'. You have all agreed sensible targets for your work with your teachers. I was pleased by the way you discuss these and can explain the good progress you have made. It was also good to watch the Year 5 and 6 pupils checking their books to see what the teacher had written and then correcting their work. This is another big improvement on last year.

Like all inspectors I can always think of things to improve! Most of you learn to read and write very quickly and produce some quality work in English. However, you get less opportunity to use your writing skills in other subjects and I have asked teachers to make sure that you do. Your 'Best Books' contain some good work, but I wonder why you aren't always as neat in your exercise books. I know you can do better! Finally, you may remember that last year the teachers were asked to take charge of different subjects. They have made a good start to this and have been planning and checking your work very carefully. Now, occasionally, I want them to watch each other teaching. This way they can learn more about each other and about you.

My two days at Steep have convinced me that your school is now a good school. Your headteacher is an excellent leader, and it is because of your help and the support of your parents, governors and Local Authority that the school continues to improve from day-to-day.

Yours sincerely

Hugh Protherough

Lead Inspector