

Steam Mills Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	115522
Local Authority	Gloucestershire
Inspection number	326215
Inspection date	13 November 2008
Reporting inspector	Peter Clifton

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

The registered childcare, managed by the governing body, was inspected under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	115
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS	0
Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years	17
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Leigh Grantham
Headteacher	Janet Williams
Date of previous school inspection	2 May 2006
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Steam Mills Cinderford GL14 3JD
Telephone number	01594 822567
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Age group	4–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is a smaller than average school. A minority of children attend from the immediate locality with most coming from the local town of Cinderford. Nearly all pupils are of White British origin. There is an average proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, mostly with literacy needs and a few with emotional and behavioural needs. The small numbers in each year group means that there is variation in attainment on entry into the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS).

The school has been successful in gaining awards, including Healthy Schools and Eco-School (Silver) status.

There is a pre-school playgroup on the school premises that is not managed by the governing body and is registered by Ofsted.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Steam Mills is a satisfactory school. Pupils' good personal development and well-being are a strength of the school. Their positive attitudes to learning and considerate behaviour are the result of the good care, support and guidance provided. The headteacher plays a key role in nurturing the school's family atmosphere and celebrating pupils' successes. Satisfactory teaching enables pupils, including those in the EYFS, to make satisfactory progress. Standards are broadly average and achievement is satisfactory. Leaders have rightly identified that too few pupils reach the higher levels in writing.

Harmonious relationships help most pupils to enjoy school a good deal and attend regularly. A few miss valuable learning because they are taken on holiday in term time. Pupils display a good regard for the well-being of each other. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. They have an excellent understanding of the importance of being active and the reasons for eating healthy foods. Nearly all parents agree that the school cares well for their children. Their comments that illustrate the school's strengths include, 'Staff and pupils are very friendly, polite and helpful... staff make my children feel special', and 'we are strongly encouraged to assist in activities and like the regular newsletters that come home'. Pupils like the school because they have lots of friends and get on well together. They say that their teachers are helpful and listen to them. The satisfactory curriculum provides a good range of practical activities to engage the pupils' interests. Teachers create a positive atmosphere for learning and make lessons fun. Consequently, the pupils are keen to respond in lessons and talk about what they know. However, activities do not always provide enough challenge, particularly for the more able pupils. When this happens, learning slows and a few pupils become restless. Although pupils have targets to help them improve their learning, these are not used consistently in lessons.

Leadership and management and the capacity to improve are satisfactory. Leaders have accurately identified most of the areas that need to be improved. In writing, where standards lag behind other areas, action taken through adapting the curriculum is beginning to make a difference. Overall development has been hampered because leadership responsibilities are not sufficiently well spread across the staff. This has resulted in some changes not being implemented consistently. Leaders have a clear system in place that enables the progress of individual pupils to be tracked. However, this is not used rigorously enough to ensure that pupils do not fall behind in their learning.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 3

Children's skills are broadly at the expected levels for their age on entry to the school, but below those expected in writing. Leadership and management are satisfactory. Children settle quickly and know the routines, reflecting good care and support. Adults respond quickly to children to provide emotional support. The curriculum provides enjoyable experiences to which the children respond eagerly. Children like using the computers and confidently choose what they want to do. They readily engage adults in conversation. However, writing activities are not given a sufficiently high priority and the learning of more able children is not always moved on quickly enough. The outdoor learning environment is developing satisfactorily. Leaders keep clear records to track the progress of the children and manage extra help well. Teaching

assistants make a valuable contribution to learning and development through working with groups of children.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the consistency of teaching to ensure that more pupils reach the higher levels, particularly in writing.
- Widen and strengthen leadership responsibilities across staff to ensure that improvement is led and evaluated more effectively.
- Use information about pupils' progress more rigorously to prevent them falling behind in their learning.

A small proportion of schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Children make satisfactory progress in the EYFS and reach expected standards by the time they enter Year 1. In 2008, standards at the end of Year 2 were broadly average in reading, writing and mathematics; very similar to those in 2007. Year 6 standards in 2007 were below average in English and mathematics because too few pupils reached the higher Level 5. Science results were better and broadly average. The 2008 performance information for Year 6 shows improved standards in all areas, particularly in mathematics where a high proportion of pupils reached the higher Level 5. These pupils have made satisfactory progress from their starting points in Year 3. The school's tracking of pupils shows that most are currently making satisfactory progress across the school, including those with literacy difficulties. Progress in mathematics is stronger than in English with writing being the weaker area.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils are happy in school and they are respectful towards each other. They say they enjoy school very much and like using the computers to improve their information and communication technology (ICT) skills. Children in the EYFS play together happily at break times. Pupils say they feel safe, behave well and any inappropriate behaviour is dealt with by the staff. They are confident to approach adults to share any concerns. They like being outside in the well kept grounds. Pupils' social development is strong and, for example, they helped to develop rules to enable football to be played safely at break times. They clear up sensibly and quickly after wet-play. Their understanding of other cultures is helped by links with schools in other countries. However, they have a limited understanding of the multicultural nature of the UK community.

Many pupils take part in a good range of additional sporting activities. They have responded well to a 'fruit only' initiative, especially the encouragement for them to try out fruit that they have not eaten before.

Pupils have the confidence to express their views openly and are prepared to listen to the views of others. The school council works well because pupils are responsible for making decisions and have a budget to spend. Older pupils experienced a real taste of democracy when they visited the House of Commons. Many pupils are involved in raising money for charity. Pupils are well prepared for future learning, with their positive attitudes, a strong sense of teamwork

and a clear work ethos. They have a good understanding of sustainable development and eco issues, for example by helping to ensure that lights are not left on unnecessarily.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The calm way in which the teachers manage pupils promotes harmonious relationships across the school. From the EYFS onwards, the pupils play and work confidently in groups and independently. Pupils' positive attitudes are a key factor in helping them in their learning. In lessons, teachers' questioning is mostly good and discussion is used well to improve the pupils' vocabulary. However, occasionally, questioning is too superficial, and does not extend learning. Planning does not always take enough account of the needs of different groups of pupils, particularly the more able. As a result, there are occasions when pupils do not make as much progress as they could. Teachers usually make their expectations clear about what the pupils need to achieve. However, this is not always the case and consequently, there are occasions when pupils are unable to use the time in lessons productively. Teaching assistants work effectively in small groups to help pupils extend their understanding or concentrate on their work.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The provision for personal and social education is strong and sensitively provides for pupils' needs. The curriculum is adapted very well to promote pupils' understanding of being healthy and keeping safe. Pupils particularly like the practical activities that enhance their enjoyment and involvement, such as investigating in science. Although the curriculum has been adapted to improve writing, such as through speaking and listening, more remains to be done. Boys in particular are not always given sufficient structure to help them to write. In the EYFS, writing does not have a sufficiently high profile in free choice activities. There is a good range of visits to enrich the curriculum. The recent trip to the House of Commons enhanced the pupils' understanding about the importance of being able to express opinions, and having the right to vote.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The pupils are well known to staff and the school provides a safe, secure and welcoming environment in which to learn. Children play confidently in the EYFS because of the effective care and good induction arrangements. Health and safety routines, risk assessments and child protection procedures are securely in place. There are good arrangements in place to alert pupils about e-safety. Parents much appreciate the school's caring atmosphere and friendly staff. The school quickly follows up any absence and actively promotes regular attendance. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are identified early and their progress is regularly reviewed. Pupils have helpful targets for literacy and numeracy which are very accessible. However, they are not using targets regularly enough in lessons to help with their learning. This is preventing them from making better progress.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The headteacher takes a strong lead in promoting a caring and supportive ethos. This has resulted in a school which values pupils as individuals. Leaders are actively forging links within the local community and have developed a partnership with a school in Kenya. School self-evaluation focuses on the right priorities to bring about improvement. Staff with leadership responsibilities, such as in ICT, have worked successfully to strengthen the subject and improve standards. However, responsibility for leading in other areas is not sufficiently distributed amongst staff. This has resulted in steady development and change. Monitoring of lessons accurately identifies strengths and provides points for improvement. However, this is not always followed through well enough to help teachers improve pupils' learning on a continuous basis. Systems for tracking pupils' progress are in place, although this information is not yet used to its full potential, for example as a check on the progress made by different groups of pupils or to set targets for different year groups. Governors are committed and supportive of the school. They are beginning to provide more challenge to the work of leaders.

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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?	3
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 capacity to make any necessary improvements	3

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	3
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	3
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	2
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	3
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	2
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	3

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/or disabilities make progress	3

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are 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	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	3
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 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

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	3
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	3
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	3
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

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

14 November 2008

Dear Pupils Inspection of Steam Mills Primary School, Cinderford, GL14 3JD

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave us when we visited your school. We enjoyed talking with you and were impressed with your friendliness and confidence. The valuable information you gave us was a great help. Your school provides you with a satisfactory education and you are making satisfactory progress. The leadership of your school is satisfactory. You are given good care, support and guidance.

What your school does particularly well.

- Your headteacher and other adults make sure that the school is a happy and welcoming place.
- Most of you enjoy school, have positive attitudes to learning and behave well.
- You have an exceptional understanding about being healthy.
- The youngest children have settled in quickly and happily.
- The school ensures you are safe and secure.
- You all get on well together and with your teachers.
- Lessons are usually fun, which is helping you to enjoy learning.
- Your visit to the chamber of the House of Commons was a particularly valuable experience.

We have asked your headteacher and the other adults to do these things.

- Improve teaching so that more of you are helped to reach the higher levels, particularly in writing.
- Give your teachers and other adults more responsibility to make sure that changes being made are helping you to learn better.
- Ensure that any of you who begin to fall behind are given extra help as quickly as possible.

With your hard work, you can help your school to improve further.

Yours faithfully

Peter Clifton Lead Inspector