

Steeple Morden CofE VC Primary School

Inspection report

Unique reference number	110793
Local authority	Cambridgeshire
Inspection number	378172
Inspection dates	9–10 February 2012
Lead inspector	Stephen Walker

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	5–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	192
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Alison Butterworth
Headteacher	Richard Lloyd
Date of previous school inspection	20 March 2007
School address	7 Hay Street Steeple Morden Royston SG8 0PD
Telephone number	01763 852474
Fax number	01763 853112
Email address	Office@steeplemorden.cambs.sch.uk

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Introduction

Inspection team

Stephen Walker

Additional inspector

Alan Jarvis

Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. The inspectors visited 17 lessons and observed eight teachers. Meetings were held with the headteacher, the Chair and Vice Chair of the Governing Body, members of the senior management team, staff and groups of pupils. Inspectors took account of the responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) in planning the inspection. Inspectors observed the school's work and looked at a range of evidence, including the school development plan, the tracking system to monitor pupils' progress, safeguarding documentation, and a sample of pupils' work. They also analysed questionnaires completed by staff, pupils and 107 parents and carers.

Information about the school

The school is of average size, serving a number of local villages and hamlets to the west of Royston. The majority of pupils are from White British backgrounds although there is a very small number from minority ethnic backgrounds. The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is below average. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is also below average. The school has experienced a high rate of pupil mobility over the last few years due to family relocations. The school has exceeded the floor standards, the minimum expectations for attainment and progress set by the government.

Provision for the Early Years Foundation Stage is organised through the Reception class. The privately run 'Smarties' pre school, after school and holiday clubs are located on the school site in a new building but did not form part of this inspection. The school has received the Activemark, the International School Award, Eco-Schools Bronze Award, ICT Mark and has achieved National Healthy Schools status. The school has recently formed a new senior management team, which includes the headteacher, two assistant headteachers and the bursar.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness	2
Achievement of pupils	2
Quality of teaching	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	2
Leadership and management	2

Key findings

- This is a good school, which provides a safe and happy atmosphere. Pupils enjoy their time at school and develop into friendly and considerate individuals.
- Pupils' achievement is good. By the time they leave the school, attainment is consistently high in English and above average in mathematics. Progress is good overall although pupils in Year 6 made outstanding progress in English in 2011. The accelerated progress in English has not been matched by the same rate of improvement in mathematics.
- Teaching is good and there is a positive atmosphere for learning in lessons. It has generated high levels of enthusiasm for reading and writing through imaginative teaching strategies and good use of theme days. However, teachers of mathematics do not always challenge higher-attaining pupils or regularly check pupils' understanding of key skills and concepts.
- Pupils' behaviour is good and they feel very safe in the school; this is confirmed by the views of parents and carers. Pupils are polite and respectful and they have positive attitudes to learning. Attendance is above average and improving.
- The strong emphasis on education of the whole child and the development of a creative curriculum are effectively promoting pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- Leadership and management are good. The headteacher is providing clear direction for the school. The tracking of pupils' progress and the identification and support for underachieving pupils, which were issues in the previous inspection, are now strengths of the school. The governors are active in supporting and monitoring school improvements. The senior management team and the core subject leaders are growing in their roles but have not yet fully developed their supporting and monitoring responsibilities. The school has good capacity to improve.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the attainment and achievement of pupils throughout the school in mathematics by:
 - providing more structured and challenging work for high attaining pupils
 - ensuring that teacher explanations of tasks, concepts and skills are consistently clear to all pupils so that they can progress at a faster rate
 - raising the focus of mathematics throughout the school through theme days and display work.

- Develop the leadership and management skills of the senior management team and core subject leaders by:
 - extending their monitoring and evaluation responsibilities within teaching, curriculum, interventions and assessment
 - providing more opportunities for them to be involved in lesson observations
 - encouraging them to support teachers and share outstanding practice.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

Most parents and carers who responded to the inspection questionnaire feel that their children make good progress during their time at the school. The inspection found that achievement is good across the school. Children enter the Early Years Foundation Stage with skills that are typical for children of that age although there is some variation between different cohorts. They make good progress so that many children enter Year 1 with skills and knowledge that are above the expected levels. A good range of structured activities is having a positive impact on their personal development as well as promoting strong number and language skills. The children successfully develop their social skills, behave well and help each other.

Pupils continue to achieve well in Key Stage 1 mainly because of the consistently good teaching. Pupils make good progress in Year 1 and 2 in reading, writing and mathematics. Standards in reading are well above average because this is a key focus in the school. Pupils read regularly in school and at home each day; this is greatly supporting their progress. Pupils use their knowledge of letter sounds well to read and spell unfamiliar words.

By the time pupils leave the school, attainment has been consistently high in English and above average in mathematics. Progress has been typically good in both subjects although Year 6 pupils demonstrated outstanding progress in their English tests in 2011. The school has been particularly successful in accelerating progress in English through imaginative teaching and an additional emphasis on writing through

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whole school projects and across all subject areas. Pupils are encouraged to develop their questioning and speaking skills, which are supporting higher standards in independent writing.

Pupils' current work shows that the majority are making good progress and achieving well. Most pupils enjoy learning and make good progress in their lessons. For example, teacher's good use of group work and effective support ensured that Year 6 pupils were fully engaged in their work in English and made good progress in their understanding of similar words, which have different spellings and meanings. In a number of mathematics lessons observed, progress was good but class tasks were very similar for all pupils so that there were few opportunities to give challenge for high achievers.

The well-developed tracking system and range of intervention strategies are used effectively to identify and support underachieving pupils at all levels. The school is presently providing considerable additional support, such as booster classes in numeracy and literacy for small groups of pupils in most year groups. Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs and those entitled to free school meals make good progress in line with others. The small number of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds also makes good progress.

Quality of teaching

The quality of teaching is good and enables all groups of pupils to achieve well during their time at school. Most teachers plan interesting activities and have high expectations for their pupils. For example, in a Year 3 science lesson, the teacher sustained a good pace to learning by presenting the pupils with a number of exciting and manageable tasks to test which liquids are damaging to teeth. The range of activities engaged the pupils' interest and motivation throughout the lesson.

In lessons observed during the inspection, the teaching of English was particularly strong and this was also highlighted by some parents in the questionnaire. Teachers show a passion for reading and writing, which is transferred to pupils. Staff make good use of a range of teaching strategies with many opportunities for pupils to develop their skills through other subjects and during theme days. Pupils work diligently towards their next steps in learning and are given support to help them reach their challenging targets. There is an impressive amount of pupils' English work on display around the school, which celebrates independent writing and increases pupils' confidence.

Outstanding teaching was seen when teachers challenged their pupils with high quality questioning and encouraged them to take greater responsibility for their work. This often led to greater engagement and accelerated progress for pupils. Pupils who find learning difficult are well supported by teaching assistants in class or withdrawn on a daily basis in small groups for extra help in reading, writing and numeracy. Many of these pupils make good progress so that they can resume normal lessons.

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Most teachers are using assessment of progress well to inform their planning and teaching of lessons so that the activities meet the different learning needs of the pupils. However, teaching in mathematics lessons does not always challenge the higher-attaining pupils and teachers do not always provide sufficiently clear explanations of the skills and concepts necessary for the tasks. In general, pupils receive good verbal feedback on how well they are doing and they are aware of their targets. Teachers' marking provides encouragement and guidance on how to improve their work.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Behaviour is good overall in lessons and around the school because there are well developed systems for promoting positive behaviour. Nine out of ten parents believe there is a good standard of behaviour in the school. In lessons, pupils consistently meet the school's expectations and typically there are good levels of engagement. When tasks are particularly challenging most pupils respond well and show high levels of enthusiasm and commitment. Nevertheless, in some classes pupils take a little too long to settle down to learning. Pupils show respect to others and their good attitudes in lessons enhance their learning and achievement.

Bullying is very rare. However, pupils and parents say there is occasionally some unkind behaviour particularly teasing, but that it is dealt with quickly and effectively. Teachers and other adults take good steps to ensure that all groups of pupils have an equal chance to thrive in an atmosphere of fairness, trust and without fear. Some Year 5 and 6 pupils said 'We feel very safe in school and we all get on very well with each other'. Pupils talk confidently about how they would keep themselves safe in a variety of situations such as using the internet or mobile phones. Safety around water is taken very seriously and the school's swimming pool is used to good effect to ensure that almost all pupils can swim at least 25 metres. Attendance is above average and improving because of the good steps taken to reward good attendance and minimise holidays taken in term time.

Leadership and management

The headteacher communicates a clear vision for improvement in all aspects of the school. The newly formed senior management team is already providing a catalyst for change although it has not yet fully developed its monitoring and evaluating roles. Parents and carers are very supportive of the school and value the education provided for their children. The school has improved significantly since its last inspection. All areas for improvement identified at that time have been addressed successfully. The headteacher's view of the quality of teaching is accurate and is confirmed by inspectors' judgements. However, senior leaders and leaders of core subjects are not fully involved in lesson observations or in supporting colleagues by sharing outstanding teaching practice.

The school development plan is a comprehensive working document, particularly focused on improving pupils' attainment and progress. Members of the governing

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body are well informed and are effective in their evaluating and monitoring roles. Governors have been particularly active in supporting the planning of additional buildings and upgrading the information communication technology infrastructure for the school. The school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils meet statutory requirements. Vetting procedures are rigorous; staff and governors receive training in child protection and safeguarding.

The school has developed an imaginative curriculum, which is highly relevant to pupils' needs and provides an exciting range of enrichment activities. For example, visits including those to Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge and the Victorian School in Hitchin provide effective enhancement for the curriculum as well as theme days such as the Enigma Workshop and the Second World War Day greatly increase pupils' enjoyment and experience of school. There is particularly good provision in physical education and music and all pupils in Year 4 have ukulele lessons. This broad range of experiences within the curriculum contributes well to pupils' achievements and to their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Pupils gain in confidence and self esteem, develop good social skills and a clear sense of right and wrong. The school is active in developing their awareness of different cultures as acknowledged by the International School Award.

The strong leadership of the school, the good record of pupils' achievement and their commitment to continuous improvement indicates that this school has a good capacity to improve further and become an outstanding school.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	46	46	8	0
Primary schools	8	47	40	5
Secondary schools	14	38	40	8
Special schools	28	48	20	4
Pupil referral units	15	50	29	5
All schools	11	46	38	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 31 August 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the governors and headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.
Safety	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



12 February 2012

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Steeple Morden CofE VC Primary School, Royston, SG8 0PD

Thank you for making us so welcome and for sharing your views with us during the inspection. We really enjoyed watching your lessons and looking at your work. It was also good to see you during assembly, playtime and lunch. Your school is a good one, which has made significant improvements since the last inspection. There are many positive things about your school.

- You enjoy school, attend regularly and work hard in your lessons.
- You make good progress in your subjects and attain above average standards.
- You are friendly and well behaved.
- Your teachers and their support staff care greatly for you as individuals.
- Your teachers work very hard to make your lessons interesting and exciting.
- The school provides an imaginative curriculum which greatly supports your personal development and experience of school.
- Your school is well led by the headteacher, senior teachers and governors.

We have asked the headteacher, staff and governing body to do the following things to make the school even better.

- Ensure that work in mathematics is sufficiently challenging for you and that teachers check your understanding so that you can progress at a faster pace.
- Support your teachers in sharing outstanding practice so that you can make even better progress in all lessons.
- Ensure that senior leaders are regularly checking the speed of your progress and the quality of learning in lessons.

You can help by behaving well, working hard and asking plenty of questions. Keep enjoying the many things you do at Steeple Morden Primary School.

Yours sincerely

Stephen Walker
Lead inspector

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