

Steeple Morden CofE Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	110793
Local Authority	CAMBRIDGESHIRE
Inspection number	288777
Inspection date	20 March 2007
Reporting inspector	Paul Cosway

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	194
School	
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Chris Metz
Headteacher	Mr Richard Lloyd
Date of previous school inspection	14 October 2002
School address	7 Hay Street Steeple Morden Royston Hertfordshire SG8 0PD
Telephone number	01763852474
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

Steeple Morden Primary School is of average size, serving a number of local villages and hamlets to the west of Royston. The school population represents a wide mix of social backgrounds, but is generally advantaged and attainment on entry is above average. The number of pupils eligible for free school meals is below average. Pupils are mainly of White British heritage. There are no pupils at the early stages of learning English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities, including those with statements of special education need, is close to the national average. The school had an acting headteacher at the time of the inspection.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

The school judges itself to be good and improving, and the inspection confirms this. Almost all parents are pleased with the quality of education provided. They say, 'Our children love this school - we'd recommend it to anyone.'

In recent years, overall standards have been well above the national average. The attainment of most children is above the standards expected on entry to the Reception class. They make good progress and at the end of Year 2 standards are significantly above the national average. In 2006, standards fell in English in the national tests for Year 6 pupils, especially in writing. Even able pupils were making too many technical errors in their written work. The school is now working hard to improve pupils' writing skills. Currently, pupils are achieving well and Year 6 pupils are making progress towards standards that are well above average in English, mathematics and science.

Pupils' personal development is outstanding. Their behaviour is excellent and they have very positive attitudes to school. This is one of the reasons why attendance is good. Pupils learn in an ethos in which they are all valued, no matter what their backgrounds or abilities. A few parents were concerned about bullying in the recent past, but pupils are confident that there is none and they feel safe in school. Excellent provision for their welfare, health and safety ensures that they understand fully how to lead healthy lives and feel secure. They have excellent preparation for their future from the emphasis the school places on the teaching of literacy and numeracy, the many opportunities to work collaboratively and the outstanding contributions they make to the school community. The school council is effective and the pupils learn to care for each other, partly through the good examples set by all adults in the school. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent in the Christian ethos of this church school.

The curriculum is excellent and pupils enjoy the varied and rich range of activities that the school provides, including theme weeks, visits and visitors. There is a strong international element, including excellent work on the Antarctic, Mexico, Europe and Africa. Teaching and learning are good. Teachers manage their classes well and plan interesting and motivating lessons. Pupils' academic progress is tracked by the school. However, the support they were given if they were falling behind their targets was inadequate last year. The problem has been identified and the situation is improving under the guidance of the acting headteacher. He is leading and managing the school well and governors are effective. Despite recent disruptions to leadership, there has been satisfactory improvement since the last inspection and the school is well placed to continue to improve. It provides good value for money.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve pupils' writing skills by continuing to develop their ability to express their ideas clearly and well in written form, whilst ensuring that their spelling and punctuation is accurate.
- Ensure that when tracking data show that pupils are falling behind their targets they are given immediate and effective support to help them to achieve well.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Results in the national tests have been well above the national average and traditionally pupils have achieved well. In 2006, the school did not reach its targets, largely because a small group

of pupils underachieved in English. Insufficient attention was given to the evidence that they were unlikely to reach their target levels for writing. Since then, the school's systems for tracking pupils' progress and supporting those who need additional help have been strengthened.

Most pupils at the end of Reception reach the standards expected for their age, and many exceed them. In Years 2 and 6, standards are currently well above average. Pupils make very good progress in developing their reading skills. Almost all Year 6 pupils are at least reaching the standards expected for their age in mathematics and science and many attain the higher level, Level 5. All pupils, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and the gifted and talented, achieve well.

The richness of the curriculum helps to ensure that pupils reach high standards in many areas, including history, information and communication technology (ICT), art, foreign languages and physical education (PE).

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness, is outstanding. Pupils say how much they enjoy coming to school. Behaviour is excellent and there is no evidence of bullying now that there are firm procedures for dealing with any instance that may arise. There is a close feeling of family and community in the school. Pupils develop a good sense of responsibility and contribute exceptionally well to the local community through fund raising and involvement in village events. Pupils of all ages are helpful and keen to take responsibility. Members of the school council are proud to represent the interests of their classmates. Pupils are courteous and considerate. Older pupils act as buddies and play leaders to help the younger ones. Pupils' good social skills in addition to the very good literacy, mathematics and ICT skills that they acquire, give them an excellent grounding for the next stage of schooling and adult life.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching is consistently good throughout the school and this helps to explain the good progress that pupils make. Teachers' expectations are high and the pace of the lessons means that pupils learn quickly. They are planned well, with different challenges to meet pupils' individual needs. Extra support for those who need it is given by the teaching assistants, who are very effective. Pupils learn to concentrate and work hard because the lessons are interesting and enjoyable. The management of pupils is good and relationships are often very good. Teachers use ICT very well as a teaching aid to make lessons exciting. In all classrooms, there is a good learning ethos, with pupils working well both individually and in small groups, learning to collaborate and listening to the ideas of others. The marking of pupils' work does not always pick up the errors they make. Teachers do not set enough short term targets for pupils to show them how to improve their work.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

Beginning in the Foundation Stage, the school provides a broad and balanced curriculum. Throughout the school, teachers plan a wide range of relevant and interesting learning opportunities that stimulate pupils' interest and imagination. Provision for basic skills, such as ICT, is increasingly effective. The curriculum is modified to take account of the needs of all, including those with learning difficulties as well as those with particular talents. There is an effective focus on ensuring that pupils are healthy and fit. Themed weeks further stimulate interest and enthusiasm and there is excellent provision for art, PE and history. There is a very good range of clubs, visits and visitors to enrich the curriculum.

The provision for personal, social and health education (PSHE) is excellent and pupils are taught to appreciate the many cultures of the world. This enables pupils to contribute to the global community, by raising money for charities overseas as well as by exchanging emails.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Pastoral care and support are excellent and are stronger than the academic guidance offered. Arrangements to ensure pupils' safety are robust and meet current requirements fully. Teachers and other staff know the pupils well and understand their needs thoroughly. Pupils and parents express confidence that staff give them all the support required if any difficulties arise. Many parents wrote in praise of the support and care that the school shows to their children, especially those who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

Academic guidance is satisfactory. Last year, the tracking information about pupils' progress indicated that significant numbers of those in Year 6 were underachieving, but too little was done to motivate them and help them to raise the standard of their work. More robust systems are now in place to track the progress made. Pupils who need additional coaching in order to reach their potential have been identified and booster lessons are organised to help them. These are at an early stage and the school is monitoring them carefully to measure their effectiveness.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Good leadership from the acting headteacher, whose permanent appointment was confirmed just before the inspection, has brought about some significant improvements in the effectiveness of the school and a recovery in the standards achieved. Since September, he has improved discipline in the school, identified and dealt with the reasons for the fall in the performance in 2006 and raised staff morale.

The governing body's support and monitoring of the school are good. The coordinators for English, mathematics and science have a clear understanding of how to take their subjects forward and are now providing effective leadership. All teachers take part in the process of school improvement planning and review, and the senior team has a commitment to developing the skills and expertise of all who work in the school, including teachers and support staff. The school has good partnerships with other organisations that help to meet the needs of all pupils.

Parents value the leadership of the new headteacher and both they and the pupils recognise that their opinions are taken into account in the running of the school.

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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
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	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

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?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The behaviour of learners	1
The attendance of learners	2
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1

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?	1
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 performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	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

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

21 March 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Steeple Morden CofE Primary School, 7 Hay Street, Steeple Morden, Royston, Hertfordshire, SG8 0PD

Thank you for being so friendly and helpful to me when I visited your school. I enjoyed sharing your lessons and talking to you. You all told me how much you love your school. I agree with you that it is a good school and that there are some outstanding things about it. I was impressed with how helpful and kind you are to each other. I enjoyed the Year 5 and 6 assembly. Your comments about the story you were told were sensible and thoughtful. You were very well behaved and there was a real sense of a spiritual occasion. These are some of the other good and outstanding things about your school:

- you work hard in lessons and your behaviour is excellent
- you are doing better at your work and standards are much higher than in many other schools
- your headteacher and senior staff have good ideas about ways to improve the school
- teachers make lessons enjoyable
- teachers, teaching assistants and all adults care for you very well
- you are helped to be healthy and safe.

I have asked your school to try to make things even better. The most important things are that:

- the school must ensure that it helps you if you fall behind in your work
- when teachers mark your work, they pick out things for you to practise so that your spelling and punctuation improve.

Keep working hard and make the most of your time at this delightful school.

Paul Cosway

Lead Inspector