

Inspection of Steeple Morden CofE VC Primary School

7 Hay Street, Steeple Morden, Royston, Hertfordshire SG8 0PD

Inspection dates: 28 and 29 November 2023

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Requires improvement

Personal development

Requires improvement

Leadership and management

Requires improvement

Early years provision

Requires improvement

Previous inspection grade

Good

What is it like to attend this school?

In general, pupils are cheerful and polite. They are keen to offer a helping hand. For example, the 'garden force' tend to the weeds while the 'library team' tidy the book stock.

Occasionally, pupils contend with others' distracting antics in lessons. This interferes with learning. On the odd occasion, these antics spill over into pupils using unkind words or actions. These can hurt pupils' feelings and make them feel uncomfortable. Still, when this happens, pupils share their concerns. Staff listen and provide assurance before speaking to the pupils involved. However, this does not always put a stop to it.

Pupils are keen to take part in activities. Pupils happily rehearse for a nativity or give it their all in a cross-country event. However, the extra-curricular offer is somewhat sparse. For example, the before- and after-school clubs are few. This limits pupils' ability to develop their talents and interests.

Pupils' achievement is too variable. Some pupils are articulate and motivated. They achieve well, even when subject to weaker teaching. Other pupils lack the background knowledge or support from home that mitigates weaker teaching. The school needs to do more to ensure that every pupil achieves their very best.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

Leaders, including the governing body, are well meaning. They want the school to do well. Some recognise that aspects of the school need to improve. Others hold an overgenerous evaluation of the school. This lack of strategic oversight means issues are taking too long to resolve. Furthermore, there are difficulties with school finances. This hampers purchasing resources and arranging staff training and support. Nevertheless, the local authority and the diocese are making headway in stemming the decline in standards.

The curriculum, including in the early years, is underdeveloped. Despite the school's best efforts, there are some subjects that lack precision. It is unclear what exact knowledge and skills pupils should learn. Also, the system the school devised to check pupils' learning often involves staff determining whether a pupil has or has not achieved a vague statement. Because of this, there are lessons where pupils complete poorly planned activities. Staff are unclear what exactly pupils need to learn and how to use assessments to inform what pupils should learn next. Sometimes, pupils go without the guidance they need to apply their reading, writing and mathematics well. Over time, mistakes bed in and hamper pupils' achievement.

The school adopted a rigorous phonics programme. Where teaching is better, staff look and listen to pupils. They use their observations to provide helpful prompts. They explain, for example, the slight difference in how to pronounce the digraph 'th' in words such as feather or moth. However, because training is infrequent, some

teaching is patchy. The activities staff arrange do not align well to the phonics programme. Pupils' attention wanes, making it hard for them to listen and learn. In addition, not all pupils receive a book containing the letter sounds they know. They trip up on words and become despondent. This does little to encourage a love of reading.

Typically, pupils attend school regularly and behave well. However, the measures put in place for misbehaving are not rectifying the silly or unkind behaviours as best they should. The more time that passes, the more these behaviours become the norm. This then makes it harder for leaders and staff to reflect on what it is like for other pupils to witness these behaviours and the impact they have on learning.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) receive the same variable school experience. Nevertheless, those overseeing SEND support are driven and determined. The 'pupil passports' provide the guidance staff need to arrange appropriate additional support. This works well for addressing certain barriers to learning. For example, visual prompts for sequencing help pupils to complete tasks with increasing independence.

The personal development programme has its strengths. For example, strong links with the church encourage pupils to be part of the local community. However, there are issues around a few pupils' understanding of difference. This impacts on what they say and do. Though the school has plans to broaden pupils' experiences, too much of this has yet to take effect. Pupils are not yet privy to a wide set of experiences.

Leaders and staff are supportive of one another. This feeds into how they engage with parents. Staff in the early years set the scene well. For example, they facilitate a play date before the school year begins. This allows families and children to mix and mingle, bringing them into the fold.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Leadership is not as strong as it needs to be. It impairs accurate evaluation of the school to identify priorities and realise these through clear, time-limited actions to fully address issues. Leaders should access the training and support they need to move the school forwards, engaging in a clear and efficient cycle of school development.
- The curriculum lacks precision. Consequently, staff go without the guidance needed to arrange lessons that impart knowledge and skills effectively. Additionally, because staff are unclear about what precisely pupils should learn,

their checks on learning, including plans to assess against some vague statements, are unhelpful for informing teaching. The school should put in place a curriculum that specifies the words, concepts and skills pupils need to learn, providing staff with the support they need to deliver the curriculum confidently and well.

- There is a lack of training and support around the school's early reading programme. This includes ensuring all pupils receive a book containing sounds they know. Not all staff are equipped to ensure pupils keep up with the pace of learning and learn to read fluently and with expression by the time they leave Year 6. The school should put in place the training and resources staff need to teach pupils how to read confidently and fluently.
- The school's chosen approach to managing and supporting pupils' behaviour is not working for a significant minority. As a result, there are pupils who disrupt learning and make some other pupils feel uncomfortable. Leaders should ensure they and their staff instil the behaviours that ensure all pupils access learning and feel at ease in school.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	110793
Local authority	Cambridgeshire
Inspection number	10268085
Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	4 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	172
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Mark Arnold
Headteacher	Tracey How
Website	www.steeplemorden.cambs.sch.uk
Dates of previous inspection	11 and 12 May 2022, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school is part of the Diocese of Ely. The school has a religious character, Church of England, and was last inspected under section 48 of the Education Act 2005 on 22 March 2017. The school's next section 48 inspection will be within eight school years of that date.
- The school does not make use of any alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.
- Inspectors discussed any continued impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.

- Inspectors held meetings with leaders, including the headteacher, three assistant headteachers, several governors and representatives working on behalf of the diocese and the local authority.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, history and art. For each deep dive, the inspector discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to staff, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. The lead inspector also listened to a sample of pupils read to a familiar adult.
- To further inspect the curriculum, inspectors met with leaders to review curriculum plans and/or discuss training and support. Inspectors also carried out brief lessons visits and/or held further discussions with pupils.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors reviewed the single central record; examined safeguarding records; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of documentation, including school policies, the school development plan, self-evaluation form, the school's own parent and pupil surveys and minutes from meetings of the governing body.
- Inspectors gathered pupils' views by holding discussions with some of them, as well as talking to pupils during lessons and at lunchtime. Inspectors also observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and at lunchtime.
- Inspectors gathered parents' views by reviewing the 37 responses, including 30 free-text responses, submitted to the online survey, Ofsted Parent View. An inspector also spoke to some parents at the start of a school day.
- Inspectors gathered the views of staff by speaking to several of them and reviewing the 19 responses to Ofsted's staff survey.

Inspection team

Daniel Short, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Fiona Webb

Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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Textphone: 0161 618 8524
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