

The Topsham School

Inspection report

Unique reference number	131108
Local authority	Devon
Inspection number	381302
Inspection dates	22–23 February 2012
Lead inspector	Ann Henderson HMI

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	242
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Emma Rihll
Headteacher	Claire Browne
Date of previous school inspection	13 September 2006
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Age group	3–11
Inspection date(s)	22–23 February 2012
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Introduction

Inspection team

Ann Henderson

Her Majesty's Inspector

David Storrie

Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Inspectors observed teaching and learning in 18 lessons taught by 10 teachers; three were joint observations with the headteacher. In addition, inspectors carried out short visits to classes to focus on behaviour and safety and the quality of pupils' learning in lessons. Discussions were held with parents and carers, pupils, staff, including senior and middle leaders and the Chair of the Governing Body. Inspectors took account of the responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) in planning the inspection, observed the school's work, and looked at school documentation which included the school development plan, safeguarding documents, information on pupils' attainment and progress, external monitoring reports and minutes of governing body meetings. Inspectors analysed 118 questionnaires from parents and carers and other questionnaires from pupils and staff.

Information about the school

This is an average-sized primary school. It has an Early Years Foundation Stage unit for 34 nursery-aged and 30 reception-aged children. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is below average. Most pupils are from White British backgrounds. Almost all pupils' first language is English. While the proportion of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs is below average, the percentage with a statement of special educational needs is well-below average. The proportion of pupils entering or leaving the school other than at the usual times is much lower than the national average for primary schools. The school exceeded the current floor standards.

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

- The Topsham School is a good school. Since the previous inspection, it has increased its effectiveness by involving senior and middle leaders and members of the governing body in rigorously monitoring the work of the school. Leaders and managers monitor the quality of teaching and learning effectively, providing appropriate training to develop staff through coaching and support. They demonstrate a good capacity to sustain further improvement.
- Pupils' attainment is above average and this has consistently been the case for the last five years. Pupils make good progress and are well prepared for the next stage in learning by the time they leave in Year 6.
- Teaching is good and sometimes exceptional. However, the marking of pupils' work is not always detailed enough to provide pupils with information on how to improve their work. In addition, although targets for reading, writing, mathematics and science are set for the differing abilities of pupils, they are not used effectively to challenge pupils or to enable them to monitor their own learning. As a result, outcomes for pupils and the quality of teaching are not outstanding.
- Pupils have good attitudes to learning and behave well in lessons and around the school. Almost all pupils say they feel safe and that instances of bullying are rare. They would like more opportunities to influence the themes and topics in the curriculum to match their interests.
- Most parents and carers are positive about the school. One parent captured the views of many by saying, 'We value the staff who are highly skilled and caring professionals. The Topsham School is a safe and happy community.' Nevertheless, some parents and carers would like to be more regularly informed about their children's progress and how they can support their children's learning. Some parents and carers, particularly of pupils in Key Stage 2, felt communication could be more timely.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase pupils' understanding of their own learning, through opportunities to evaluate their own work so they develop an awareness of how to improve, by:

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- consistently providing effective marking and feedback to pupils and encouraging them to respond to marking comments
 - providing sharply focused individual targets for pupils, to promote learning and help them to monitor their own progress
 - enabling pupils to shape the curriculum to meet their interests with further rich and memorable experiences.
- Increasing parental involvement by:
- regularly engaging with parents and carers about their children's learning and how they can help at home
 - improving the day-to-day communication between teachers and parents and carers, particularly at Key Stage 2.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

A very large majority of parents and carers have positive views about how well the school meets their children's learning needs. Almost every parent and carer who responded to the parental questionnaire said their child is making good progress. Inspection evidence substantiates their views. Pupils enjoy school and, by the time they leave at the end of Year 6, their attainment in English and mathematics is above average. In the Early Years Foundation Stage, the achievement of children in all areas of learning is usually good. In 2011 it was outstanding. This is because children are provided with a vibrant, exciting and stimulating learning environment, both indoors and outside. Children join the Nursery with skills and knowledge that are broadly typical for their age. They begin Year 1 with a good level of learning. Pupils' attainment in reading by the end of Year 2, and at the end of Year 6, is above average. In 2011, boys' attainment in reading and writing was lower than girls. However, the school has successfully narrowed this gap and current attainment for boys and girls is broadly similar. The systematic teaching of phonics (linking letters with the sounds they make) is effectively supporting all pupils to achieve well in reading and writing. In an English lesson, Year 2 pupils were successfully including a range of descriptive words in the poems they were writing following the stimulus of poetry by Michael Rosen. They confidently read their poems to the rest of the class.

In lessons, disabled pupils and those with special educational needs make good progress from their starting points because activities are matched to their needs and they receive effective support. Pupils enjoy their learning because of the varied activities and very good relationships they have with adults. For example, during a mathematics lesson, Year 5 and Year 6 pupils worked enthusiastically together in small groups to calculate the income and expenditure of their own 'Lunar Theme Park' designed for 2050 with a budget of £500,000. They actively discussed their learning and applied themselves to the task with sustained concentration. However, pupils expressed a desire to have greater involvement in the range of opportunities for learning in the themes and topics chosen. While pupils know where to find their

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targets, they are not sufficiently clear about the small steps they need to take to progress to the next level. This is because targets are not discussed often enough in lessons and pupils are not always clear about how to improve their learning.

Quality of teaching

Good teaching is a consistent feature in the large majority of lessons. Nearly all parents and carers agreed, commenting on the warm and welcoming environment, with well-chosen, structured activities to make learning fun. Pupils concur and said that lessons are enjoyable and interesting, although a few said that some topics are repeated in different year groups. Nevertheless, teachers are successful in establishing an environment for learning that fosters independence and creativity. The high expectations of pupils when working together contribute effectively to their moral and social development. Teachers have good subject knowledge and, in the best lessons, use astute questioning to develop pupils' understanding and to support good progress. Lessons are characterised by clearly defined expectations, and objectives for learning explained well at the outset. As a result, pupils work hard and know what is expected of them by the end of the lesson. Teachers use assessment information well to plan interesting and challenging activities for the differing abilities of pupils. In one Year 6 lesson, the teacher enthused pupils to write short stories with flashbacks, using time exceptionally well and reshaping learning through effective questioning. As a result, pupils made outstanding progress.

Effective planning engages pupils in wider learning opportunities. Good use is made of partnerships with the local community, particularly in developing pupils' understanding of sustainability. During the inspection, for example, some of the younger pupils visited a local farm. This supports pupils in developing a greater understanding of the environment and is a positive contribution to their spiritual awareness. Partnerships with contrasting local schools and with a school in Uganda support pupils' cultural awareness well.

The quality of marking and feedback to pupils is inconsistent. It provides more guidance on how to improve in writing than in other subjects. Pupils reported that when feedback is offered, it is helpful in guiding them to improve their work. In mathematics, pupils benefit from praise, but insufficient information is given to pupils on the next steps in learning. Pupils are not always provided with opportunities to respond to marking and to show improvements.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils talk with confidence about the school's expectations of how they should treat each other. The school's golden rules set out these expectations clearly. Pupils' views were sought in devising the rules and these make a strong contribution to the well-ordered and positive environment for learning. Their responsible attitude to their own work is a major contributory feature to good quality learning. Most parents and carers agree that there is a good standard of behaviour and that lessons are not disrupted. Inspection evidence confirms that pupils, including children in the Early

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Years Foundation Stage, display high levels of self-discipline and are considerate, courteous and respectful to adults and to one another and that behaviour is good in lessons. Pupils are keen to come to school and this is reflected in their above-average attendance.

Every parent and carer who responded to the questionnaire said their child feels safe in school and pupils agreed. They are confident that should a problem arise, there is an adult on hand to support them and resolve any issues. The large majority of parents and carers believe that the school effectively deals with any bullying issues. Inspection evidence confirmed that there have been no recent incidents of bullying. A significant proportion of those parents and carers who completed the questionnaire felt unable to answer this question because their children have not experienced any bullying. The curriculum effectively promotes pupils' understanding of bullying issues. During the inspection, Year 6 pupils were learning about cyber-bullying and how to deal with it, should it ever arise. Pupils' responses were mature and deeply thoughtful.

Leadership and management

The headteacher and senior leaders provide dedicated and determined leadership. Middle leaders and subject leaders have developed their leadership skills and effectively plan actions for improvement in their areas of responsibility. Training and support are provided for teaching staff to further develop their teaching skills. As a result, leadership and management demonstrate a good capacity to sustain improvements. The new system for tracking the attainment and progress of pupils is successfully enabling leaders and managers to identify underachievement and to plan suitable intervention programmes to accelerate progress. Consequently, all pupils are given an equal opportunity to succeed and no pupil is allowed to fall behind in learning.

The governing body has effective systems in place to check on the school's progress. Governors have increased their monitoring roles. They understand the strengths and weaknesses of the school because they receive appropriately detailed information and have a good understanding of the school's performance data. As a result, school development planning is sharply focused on appropriate priorities. The governing body contributes well to the self-evaluation process. The school's safeguarding and child protection procedures meet requirements. All staff are suitably trained, enabling adults and pupils to work and learn in a safe and secure environment.

The quality of the curriculum is good. It successfully engages pupils in learning through interesting topics. For example, the school provides good opportunities for pupils to learn about sustainability through growing plants and vegetables and frequent visits to a local farm. A wide range of additional activities enriches the curriculum. Many pupils learn musical instruments and pupils regularly take part in music and art festivals during the year. There are good links with contrasting schools both nationally and internationally, providing a strong contribution to pupils' good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

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.



24 February 2012

Dear Pupils

Inspection of The Topsham School, Topsham, Exeter EX3 0DN

Thank you for welcoming us to your school, and special thanks to those of you who took the time to talk to us. We found you extremely interesting to talk to and very polite and helpful. You spoke enthusiastically about your school and how much you enjoy learning.

Yours is a good school. You behave well and feel safe in school and know there is always someone to talk to if you have a problem. You enjoy learning, which is reflected in your above average attendance. Your teachers support your learning well because they plan lessons to match your learning needs. Although marking helps you to improve your learning in writing, it is less effective in other subjects. We have asked your teachers to provide you with clearer feedback on how to improve your work in all subjects. You told us that you have targets in reading, writing, mathematics and science. However, these targets are not used regularly enough to help you to check on your own progress. We have asked your teachers to sharply focus your targets to help you to monitor your own learning more effectively. You also told us that there are many exciting topics that you learn about in school, but you would like to be more involved in deciding on the things you will learn about. We have asked your teachers to provide you with these opportunities.

Your parents and carers are very supportive of your school, but would like to be more involved in your learning. Your headteacher, the staff and members of the governing body are doing many good things to make your school even better. We have asked them to provide information more regularly to your families to enable your parents and carers to understand more about your learning and how they can help you at home.

It was a real privilege to visit your school. Continue to work hard and, most of all, enjoy your learning. Thank you again for your help.

Yours sincerely

Ann Henderson
Her Majesty's Inspector

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