

Torfield School

Croft Road, Hastings, TN34 3JT

Inspection dates

12–13 December 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- All pupils achieve well and make good or outstanding progress. By the time they are ready to leave the school, they are well prepared for the next stage of their education.
- Good teaching is typically found at this school and there is a small amount which is outstanding. Teachers, including those who work in the Early Years Foundation Stage, have high expectations that all pupils will work hard. They plan lessons which keep pupils busy and learning well.
- Pupils' behaviour in class is good. They are very positive and keen to learn. This good behaviour is also to be seen in the playground and in the dining hall at lunchtime.
- School leaders, including governors, regularly monitor the work of the school. As a result, they have good information about its strengths and those areas which need to be improved.
- The recently improved curriculum provides every pupil with the very best chance to take part in stimulating learning activities in classrooms and in the wider community.
- Governors and school leaders ensure that all of the school's resources are used so as to provide everyone with an equal opportunity to do well.

It is not yet an outstanding school because:

- School leaders do not fully exploit the latest available technology, including the school's virtual learning platform, by encouraging pupils to follow up on their daily learning when at home.
- When marking their work, teachers do not always provide pupils with clear advice on how to do their very best in every lesson.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed nine lessons during their visit to the school, taught by eight different teachers. In one of these lessons, two teachers shared the teaching. In two lessons, inspectors were joined by a member of the school's leadership team. This amounted to over three hours spent in classrooms.
- The views of the 21 parents and carers who took the opportunity to complete the online Parent View survey were taken into account. The school's leadership team decided against distributing the inspection questionnaire to staff, so the views of staff were sought during meetings and feedback sessions.
- Inspectors held meetings with members of the governing body, with senior leaders and with other staff. Telephone conversations were held with a representative of the local authority and the school's external adviser.
- Careful scrutiny was carried out of the school's own documentation. This included information about how school leaders plan for improvement, how they monitor the quality of teaching, important policies and minutes of governors' meetings.
- Inspectors listened to pupils read and observed speech and language development lessons. They sat with pupils at lunchtime and held meetings with them to gain their views about the school.

Inspection team

Bob Pugh, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Chris Dowsett	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school provides for pupils who live in Hastings and nearby towns and villages. Some pupils travel long distances to attend. All pupils have a statement of special educational needs.
- Since the previous inspection the school has experienced major changes and is now part of a hard federation with another special school. The schools are led by one governing body, an executive headteacher, with a head of school in charge of each school.
- Classes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage are located in a separate building at a local primary school, approximately one mile away from the main school site.
- Over 50% of pupils are eligible for the pupil premium, which provides additional support for those in the care of the local authority, those with families in the services or those who are known to be eligible for free school meals. This is much higher than the national average.
- A growing number of pupils have an autistic spectrum condition. Almost all pupils have English as their first language at home.
- The school provides a number of after-school clubs. The partner school in the federation offers a summer holiday school for pupils when they leave at the end of Year 6 to help them prepare for the move to Year 7.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Provide more opportunities for pupils to make even better progress, by extending the use of online learning, so that pupils and parents and carers have a deeper understanding of how important key skills worked on in classrooms can be built on at home and in the local community.
- Raise the standard of teaching so that more is outstanding by ensuring that:
 - marking and annotation of pupils' work by teachers are always highly focused on what they need to do to make even more progress in every lesson.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

is good

- From their very earliest days, pupils work hard and make good progress. The youngest children respond positively to what is expected of them because the staff who work with them plan with great care to meet their individual needs. The good learning habits developed in the Early Years Foundation Stage prepare the children well for the move into school.
- All pupils in all year groups make good progress. There are no differences among groups. Girls do as well as boys and those pupils eligible for the pupil premium achieve as well as others. Pupils do at least as well as those with similar needs at other schools. The numbers who make more rapid progress in English and mathematics is growing every year. As a result of good teaching, the gap narrows between pupils here and those in mainstream settings. Nevertheless, because all have such low starting points on entry, their attainment levels remain below average when they leave.
- Opportunities to assess their own progress are confidently taken up by pupils. One pupil was observed to be checking his workbook in English before deciding whether he had achieved his most recent target. He thoughtfully discussed how much he had learned with his teacher, before deciding on his own grade.
- Pupils enjoy reading; those who met an inspector to give their views about the school were very keen to use the opportunity to read from their latest library books or their own workbooks. Some used their good word building skills to read an unfamiliar word while others were able to alter the tones in their voices according to which character in the story was speaking.
- Pupils concentrate well in lessons to learn new skills. In a highly effective music lesson, they learned about rhythm, when to clap or play a note and when to stay silent. They used their good counting skills to produce the right sounds at the right time, so that by the end of the lesson, everyone was able to join in and perform to a high standard.
- Pupils make good gains in motor skills as a result of good teaching in physical education.

The quality of teaching

is good

- In all classes, including those for the very youngest children, teachers and their assistants regularly check how much each one has learned by asking highly focused questions. They use this information to good effect to plan the next learning steps. Where pupils are seen to be making rapid progress, they challenge them to do even more. For example, in a lively English lesson, some pupils were encouraged to think about adjectives which could be included in their stories to make them more exciting. At the same time, other pupils were offered good support to improve their handwriting.
- Teachers have high expectations that their pupils will work hard and learn well. They plan lessons and organise their rooms in such a way as to ensure that everyone has the best chance to do well. Because of this, everyone knows what they are meant to be doing and time is very rarely wasted. Teachers prepare extremely well for lessons which take place outside the classroom. In a well-planned swimming lesson for pupils who have an autistic spectrum condition, the teacher used a symbolised sentence strip from the side of the pool, which pupils followed closely to prepare for the next activity.
- Marking and annotation of pupils' work are usually good but there are some inconsistencies. On a few occasions, teachers do not offer pupils clear advice about what they need to do next, and because there are gaps in the marking of some books, pupils are not always clear about how well they have done.
- Teaching assistants make a strong contribution to learning, for example, by following up on therapy programmes with individual children. This has led to the raising of standards in speaking and listening, with more pupils making good or better progress.

- Teachers encourage their pupils to assess their own work during lessons and to talk to others about how much they have achieved. As a result, pupils grow in confidence as they move through the school and gain a good understanding of how successful they are at meeting their targets.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Pupils behave very well in lessons. They are confident at displaying their skills to others because they have been encouraged by their teachers to talk about their own work and to listen politely to their classmates.
- Teachers who work with the very youngest children take time to model good behaviour for them so that they can stay in the teaching circle and join in with all the activities.
- Because teachers are consistent in their approach to improving behaviour, pupils learn quickly that they will have to make up the time if they misbehave in a lesson or waste time. As a result, they are almost always very positive in class. Pupils understand the rewards systems and are keen to show visitors how many 'smiley faces' they have earned. Other pupils talk confidently about the privileges they enjoy as a result of good work and excellent behaviour.
- Pupils are taught about common hazards when they are out and about in the local community. A well-planned e-safety week alerted them to some of the dangers which can occur when using the internet.
- At lunchtimes and break times, pupils enjoy each other's company and are kind and considerate. One pupil who noticed that a friend was struggling to cut something on his plate, quickly and with great sensitivity offered to help. The atmosphere around the school is calm and orderly, with staff ready to intervene where necessary but often choosing to stay in the background as they trust pupils to try very hard to manage their own behaviour.
- Pupils say that they feel very safe at school and they know who to turn to when they feel worried. They enjoy spending time with their friends at school and they say that they enjoy making things in technology. They also like games and swimming and the weekly achievement assembly.
- Bullying of any kind is very rarely heard of at this school. When it does occur, incidents are carefully recorded and the victim and perpetrator are given good support.
- Parents and carers are right to be confident that their children are well looked after at school.

The leadership and management are good

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- The executive headteacher, head of school and senior leaders, supported by a strong governing body are the driving force behind the school's improvement in the last two years. The hard federation has strengthened the governing body.
- School leaders regularly monitor lessons and meet teachers to discuss their performance. Well-received professional development opportunities have led to improvements in teaching.
- As a result, they have been able to provide challenge and support in those areas where improvement was required which has led to the raising of standards of teaching and pupils' achievements. A very successful drive to boost attendance levels has resulted in pupils' attendance being above average for special schools.
- School leaders at all levels are ambitious for their pupils and they organise resources to ensure that each one has the best opportunity to achieve well. An internet based learning programme has been introduced across the school federation to boost pupils' information and communication and technology (ICT) skills. This is shared between the two schools and with pupils' families at home, but not all opportunities for encouraging parents and carers to help

their children to learn more at home have been fully exploited.

- The recently revised curriculum ensures that no pupil misses any elements of the learning and activities offered. How well each subject is being taught is checked frequently by school leaders and managers, including members of the governing body.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. There are regular opportunities to join in with musical and drama performances, including with other schools. Pupils are taught to think about similarities and differences between cultures and lifestyles.
- Sports funding has been used to recruit a specialist teacher to improve physical education teaching and to broaden the range of after-school clubs which are available.
- Statutory requirements for keeping pupils safe are in place and there is good checking by senior leaders and governors that their systems are robust and work well.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors regularly undertake training to strengthen the impact they have on school leadership. They have a good understanding of how much is being achieved and how strong teaching contributes to good progress. They ensure that effective teaching and support are recognised and properly rewarded through well-organised performance management programmes.
 - Governors have acted efficiently to address financial difficulties caused by a reduction in the number of funded places. They have good information on how the pupil premium has been used to boost standards and broaden access to learning for those who are eligible and they have used sports funding money to good effect to improve pupils' physical skills.
 - The school's finances are in good order.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	114690
Local authority	East Sussex
Inspection number	400372
Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	81
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Jenny Smith
Headteacher	Richard Preece - Executive headteacher Natalie Shuttleworth - Head of school
Date of previous school inspection	16–17 September 2009
Telephone number	01424 428228
Fax number	08715 282907
Email address	office@torfield.e-sussex.sch.uk

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