

Towcester Church of England Primary School

Islington Road, Towcester, NN12 6AU

Inspection dates 1–2 October 2014

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- The headteacher, senior leaders and governors have worked effectively together to drive continual improvement since the last inspection.
- Governors ensure that resources are used effectively to ensure that pupils make good progress and achieve well. Effective deployment of the pupil premium and primary sports funding ensures that most pupils reach their potential.
- Pupils behave well in lessons and around the school. They feel safe in school and enjoy the wide range of activities that are planned for them.
- Attendance has improved and is now above national averages.
- The curriculum offers a wide range of opportunities for pupils to develop their literacy and numeracy skills. The pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is one of the main strengths of the school.
- Most pupils make good progress in their learning and recent results show that standards are rapidly improving and now reflect those seen nationally and in some cases are above national averages. Pupils have positive attitudes to learning and talk enthusiastically about their lessons.
- Parents and carers are extremely supportive and have full confidence in the school to keep their children safe. They welcome the regular informal meetings and use the informative website regularly.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Teachers' comments in pupils' books are not always sufficiently clear to help pupils improve their work.
- Pupils are not always helped quickly enough when they are not sure what to do next.
- Achievement in writing for all groups of pupils is not as strong as it is in reading and mathematics because there are not enough opportunities for pupils to write at length.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 19 lessons across all the year groups, including seven seen jointly with members of the senior leadership team.
- The inspection team held meetings with school leaders, governors, staff, representatives from the local authority and from the diocese of Peterborough and groups of pupils.
- Inspectors looked at the work in pupils' books. They examined a range of documents, including the school's own evaluation of its strengths and weaknesses, the school improvement plan, records of pupils' progress and documents relating to keeping pupils safe.
- The views of 129 parents and carers were analysed through the Parent View website, and inspectors spoke informally to groups of parents to seek their views about the school.
- The views of the 32 staff who returned questionnaires were also considered.

Inspection team

Gillian Scobie, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Jacqueline Pentlow	Additional Inspector
Glen Goddard	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Towcester Church of England Primary School is an average-sized primary school.
- Most pupils are White British. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds or who are learning English as an additional language is below average.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs supported at school action is below average but the proportion of pupils supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is above the national average.
- The proportion of pupils supported by the pupil premium, which provides additional funding for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and children who are looked after, is above the national average.
- A pre-school shares the same school site but this is not managed by the school's governing body and is subject to a separate inspection.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in English and mathematics.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching by ensuring that:
 - teachers build effectively and consistently on good practice that already exists in school
 - teachers' guidance is always clear enough to help pupils understand how to improve their work and make rapid progress
 - there are more opportunities for pupils to write at length across a range of subjects
 - help is quickly available for pupils when they are unsure of what they need to do next.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- Senior leaders have brought about a steady improvement in the quality of teaching over the last two years through their carefully planned support that has helped teachers and other adults build on and extend their classroom skills.
- The school's policies are carefully planned to ensure that literacy and numeracy are taught consistently across the school, although the marking policy is not always used effectively to guide pupils' next steps. There is a strong emphasis on safeguarding and keeping pupils safe.
- The school's self-evaluation is thorough and accurate and is used well to inform realistic targets in the plan for further development. These practical targets are regularly evaluated by senior managers and the governors and, as a result, the school is continuing to improve and move forward.
- Subjects are thoughtfully developed to sustain pupils' interest and foster their love of learning. There is a strong focus on improving and reinforcing literacy and numeracy skills across all subjects and, as a result, pupils are given a good range of opportunities to develop their reading, writing and communication skills, although opportunities for longer pieces of writing are not always planned frequently enough across a range of subjects.
- Pupils enjoy the wide-ranging choice of clubs and after-school activities that encourage them to develop their talents, especially in sport and music. The Friday afternoon 'university' programme offers constantly changing options where pupils are able to explore new subjects and areas of knowledge not usually available to children of their age, such as pinhole cameras and barrel vaulting.
- The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils is promoted exceptionally well and is a strength of the school. There are strong links with the church and local community, and the school's participation in a Comenius project has allowed the pupils to develop a deep understanding of other countries as well as respect and tolerance for the diverse range of cultures present within British society. Pupils are encouraged to reflect on how they treat each other, and this leads to an harmonious atmosphere across the school.
- The management of all available funding is closely and rigorously monitored. Pupil premium funding is used carefully to support and enhance learning and ensure that eligible pupils are able to take full advantage of the activities available to them. Sports funding is used to develop the skills of classroom teachers, provide extra equipment and allow the school to participate in local competitive sports events. As a result, the pupils gain from a rich and varied range of opportunities and develop their knowledge and skills.
- The proportion of pupils in the school who would be identified as most able is below the national average but the school runs a series of activities designed to encourage these pupils and those who have particular talents and interests. A good level of challenge in lessons, combined with mathematics, science and information and communication technology focused days which are sponsored by local industries and agencies, have resulted in an increase in the number of pupils attaining high levels in mathematics, writing, and spelling, punctuation and grammar.
- The school has worked closely with the local authority to improve the consistency and monitoring of teaching and the range of subjects available to pupils, especially in developing the teaching of phonics (the sounds that letters make). Their representative speaks highly of the guidance and support given to the staff by the headteacher and governors since the last inspection to raise standards across the school.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The well-organised governing body includes a good range of knowledge and skills. Governors are ambitious for the school. They know the school very well, visit regularly and have an accurate

understanding of its strengths and how to move it forward. They are closely involved in developing and monitoring the school's website and use it as an effective tool to foster parental support for the school and its activities. They have a very good understanding of how to monitor pupils' progress and achievement using all the available information and they regularly ask challenging questions about all aspects of school life. They set rigorous targets for the headteacher and staff that are closely linked to the school development plan and ensure that everyone is rewarded appropriately for raising standards and accelerating pupils' progress. Governors monitor the budget carefully and know how the pupil premium and primary sports funding are spent. They regularly monitor the impact of this spending on raising standards and improving the quality of learning. The governing body is fully aware of its statutory responsibilities and make sure that safeguarding arrangements meet current national requirements.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils have good attitudes to learning, are enthusiastic, respond well to challenge and are keen to do well. They arrive in class ready to learn, are supportive of each other, willingly share their work and help each other to learn.
- The conduct of pupils around the school is good. Pupils respond well to the high expectations of good behaviour modelled for them by their teachers, showing respect for adults, the environment and each other. They play well together and use the wide range of games and equipment available at break times sensibly and safely.
- The pupils are proud of their school and their school uniform and speak enthusiastically about their role as school, community and international 'ambassadors'. They are encouraged to take an active part in school life and win badges for each of these roles by helping in school, participating in local events and welcoming pupils from abroad into their homes and classrooms as part of the school exchange programme. The harmonious atmosphere around the school reflects the school's positive emphasis on mutual respect and tolerance.
- Pupils speak highly of the school's imaginative and creative range of extra-curricular activities that allows them to explore new ideas and give them confidence to adapt and learn in unfamiliar settings. They thoroughly enjoy the variety of interesting and unusual activities offered through the school's 'university' programme.

Safety

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. There are good procedures in place to ensure that the site is secure and visitors' details are properly checked.
- Pupils feel safe at school. Their parents and carers agree that the school keeps their children safe. Incidents of bullying are rare but, should they occur, pupils and parents are confident that they will be dealt with quickly and effectively by staff.
- Pupils know how to keep themselves and others safe and have a clear understanding of potential dangers, including when they are using the internet and social media.
- Attendance has improved and is currently above national averages.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teachers have high expectations of pupils. They plan interesting lessons that stimulate pupils' enjoyment and foster a deep love of learning. Pupils take pride in their work and are keen to talk about what they are doing and what they have learnt.
- Work seen in pupils' books, records kept by class teachers and senior leaders, and evidence gathered by

the inspectors demonstrate that the quality of teaching has improved since the last inspection.

- Teachers plan lessons that allow pupils to develop their literacy and numeracy skills across a wide range of subjects and topics. Pupils in Year 6 were offered challenging opportunities to use their mathematics skills in a practical way in a science lesson when researching the solar system. Pupils in Year 5 were inspired to write imaginatively by a history lesson based on the story of *Warhorse*. However, not enough lessons offer pupils opportunities to write at length.
- Teachers generally plan activities at the right levels of difficulty. Pupils are encouraged to choose the level of task that will challenge them and help them to progress quickly. Teachers use perceptive questioning to gauge how well pupils are progressing and challenge them to extend their skills and move forward.
- The school uses an agreed marking policy that recognises what is done well and identifies what pupils need to do next in order to progress. However, their written guidance is not always sufficiently clear or well focused to help some pupils, especially the less able, respond effectively and make good progress. Occasionally, teachers' handwriting does not offer a good role model to young writers who are still developing their skills.
- Pupils who need additional help, such as those with special educational needs or supported by pupil premium funding, are given well-focused support by their teachers and teaching assistants so that they learn well and make good progress. However, some less-able pupils who are not identified as having special educational needs are sometimes reluctant to ask for help when they are unsure and, as a result, their progress slows if their problem is not quickly recognised.
- Pupils are set homework in literacy, mathematics and a more general topic each week. This makes a positive contribution to their learning. Pupils enjoy working on their own and the school encourages parents to support their children at home through weekly celebration assemblies that are well attended by parents and carers.

The achievement of pupils

is good

- Pupils come into the Early Years Foundation Stage with skills that are below those typical for their age, particularly in fine motor skills and language development and communication.
- In 2013, at the end of Year 6, pupils attained above national expectations in reading, writing and mathematics. School records show that, in 2014, above average standards were maintained in reading and mathematics but they were average in writing. This difference is due to the emphasis placed on improving the teaching of reading, writing and mathematics since the last inspection and the school is currently working to improve standards in writing.
- By the end of Year 2, pupils make good progress from their starting points and standards in reading and writing are in line with national expectations, although in mathematics pupils are working approximately half a term behind pupils in similar schools.
- There has been rapid progress in achievement in phonics, and the results of the 2014 phonics screening test shows that standards have risen well above the national average. Most of the pupils who sat the test in 2014 were successful, as were most of the pupils who retook the test in Year 2.
- Pupils are offered a wide range of opportunities to read widely and often, and are encouraged to develop a love of reading. The two school libraries have a very well-organised borrowing system that is well supported by pupils of all ages. There are comfortable reading areas in each classroom and around the school to encourage pupils to sit quietly with a book, and each class is named after an author to increase pupils' awareness of the reading opportunities available. The assembly hall has recently been decorated with scenes from well-known books, and even the youngest children can name them and the authors correctly.
- School leaders made it a priority to improve the standards of grammar, punctuation and spelling across

the school last year. They introduced a focused programme of spelling sessions and increased emphasis on marking punctuation and grammar in pupils' books. This has resulted in rapid progress, and pupils in Year 6 in 2014 have reached standards well above national expectations, although there are still not enough opportunities for pupils to embed these skills in regular pieces of extended writing.

- In 2013, the attainment of disadvantaged Year 6 pupils who were eligible for pupil premium funding was in line with and, in some cases, exceeding their classmates. In reading, these pupils were working about two terms behind their classmates but were broadly in line with pupils nationally. In writing, they were working at the same level as their classmates and nearly two terms ahead of pupils nationally. In mathematics, pupils eligible for pupil premium funding were working a term and a half behind their classmates but in line with pupils nationally.
- As a result of well-targeted support, disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs make good progress overall from their starting points. School records show that, at the end of Year 6, pupils with special educational needs make good progress from their individual starting points.

The early years provision

is good

- Children's learning logs, called 'special books' show that they are taught well. They engage in a wide variety of interesting and stimulating activities which support their developing literacy and numeracy skills across all the areas of learning. Teachers closely monitor their progress and ensure that parents are regularly informed of their children's progress and developing skills.
- Children receive a warm welcome when they arrive in school and this helps them to build their confidence as they develop key skills. The outdoor space has been greatly improved since the last inspection and offers an excellent choice of activities to build confidence and stimulate play. There is a wide range of activities, both inside and out, for children to practise and improve new skills.
- Children are given clear routines to follow and this helps them to settle quickly into school life. They behave well. They respond well to the help and guidance they are offered and quickly learn to share and work well together.
- The early years team is well led and the Early Years Foundation Stage is now a strength of the school. Staff have undertaken specific training to enhance the quality of teaching in the Early Years Foundation Stage. This is particularly true of the teaching of phonics. As a result, children are quickly able to recognise sounds and basic words.
- The school carries out home visits for each child entering the Early Years Foundation Stage and parents are able to add their own observations to help build a clear picture of the children's early skills. This helps parents to support their children's learning. The implementation of a flexible recording and reporting system that is easily accessible by parents and carers ensures that they are well informed of their children's progress. Parents speak highly of the well-organised and supportive start to the new school year.

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	135506
Local authority	Northamptonshire
Inspection number	449054

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 of pupils on the school roll	252
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Julie Godwin
Headteacher	Richard Camp
Date of previous school inspection	7 November 2012
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