

Inspection of an outstanding school: Torfield School

Croft Road, Hastings, East Sussex TN34 3JT

Inspection dates:

22 and 23 February 2023

Outcome

Torfield School continues to be an outstanding school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils love coming to Torfield School. Attendance rates are high. Each day starts positively, with happy greetings between pupils and with staff, followed by breakfast served in classrooms. Pupils' happiness and strong sense of safety are evidenced through trusting relationships, smiles and laughter. The planned curriculum ensures that pupils learn about staying safe in different circumstances. Staff are highly vigilant and caring. They are trained well in a range of methods of communication as well as in safeguarding.

Leaders and staff have high expectations for pupils' behaviour, learning and personal development. 'My son is able to sound out words using phonics... something I didn't know if he would ever learn' and, 'My son has complex special needs... he has exceeded my expectations' are typical of the views expressed by parents. Pupils are motivated and value the range of prizes, certificates and 'rainbow awards' that mark and celebrate their achievements.

Pupils, families and staff are proud of their school. Extensive use is made of the outdoor environment. Trips and visits take place frequently for all pupils. Pupils' special educational needs and/or disabilities are not seen as a barrier to learning or to full participation in all that life has to offer.

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

Torfield is a school filled with high aspiration. Leaders and staff are determined that pupils develop independence and 'tools for life'. This is to enable pupils to communicate, make choices, experience successful transitions in education and beyond, and become adults who participate in and contribute to society.

To achieve this vision, leaders have placed a strong focus on the academic curriculum. This is a strength of the school, alongside the impressive personal development curriculum and bespoke provision for pupils' individual needs. Pupils enjoy a wide range of subjects. Curriculum leaders have identified themes for study and how learning will be

sequenced over time, including for children in early years. Within each subject and class, teachers know precisely what they want pupils to learn.

Teachers assess pupils' learning and development day by day, and more formally with leaders, each term. Amendments are made to provision, ensuring that all aspects of the curriculum are tailored to enable pupils to build on what they know and can do. Pupils' education, health and care plan (EHC plan) targets are seamlessly woven throughout lessons and the school day.

Pupils' personal development, including opportunities for wide experiences, is core to the school's ethos. For example, all pupils are enabled to participate in clubs and residential visits. 'Rainbow awards' chart progress in key independence skills. The extensive use of praise and rewards contributes to the atmosphere of positivity and ambition. One pupil's high aspiration was revealed when he told the inspector, 'I want to be King!'

The recent introduction of a structured phonics scheme has been a resounding success. Led by a knowledgeable subject leader, staff have been trained and high-quality resources purchased. Pupils enjoy the routines of learning sounds and blending them together to make words. They have books that are exactly matched to the sounds that they know, and they read aloud often in school. Consequently, many pupils learn to read and progress in speaking. The youngest children and those pupils who are non-verbal or pre-verbal are fully included in the school's reading and communication curriculums. For example, pupils are supported to make, listen and respond to sounds. Staff are skilled in a range of assisted communication systems, including signing, picture exchange systems and symbol-based language used with accompanying text. Throughout the school, pupils are immersed in literature, listening to carefully selected stories and texts, which contribute well to their wider learning. The headteacher shares his love of poetry in school assembly on Fridays.

With expert support from staff, pupils learn about 'zones of regulation' and how to manage their feelings and behaviour with increasing control. For example, when a pupil becomes dysregulated, adults step in and lessons continue uninterrupted.

Leadership at all levels is strong. Leaders routinely consider staff well-being and workload. The expert trust directors provide support and challenge to the chief executive officer (CEO) and the leadership team. Collectively, leaders are innovative in their thinking. The different strands of the school's work combine to form an impressive whole: Torfield School.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

A strong culture for safeguarding is embedded. Pupils, and their families, are known and cared for exceptionally well. Pupils feel safe.

Staff receive regular training and information. Consequently, they remain acutely aware of risks facing pupils, including additional risks because of pupils' specific needs. Staff share

concerns with the leaders for safeguarding. Concerns are closely monitored and acted upon. Whenever necessary, leaders work well with health professionals, social workers, the police and other agencies.

Strengths of the school include pupils' extensive learning about staying safe and the expert use of social stories to prepare pupils for different situations.

Background

When we have judged a school to be outstanding, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains outstanding. This is called an ungraded inspection and it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection, which is carried out under section 5 of the Act. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the ungraded inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

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](#)' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route.

School details

Unique reference number	141476
Local authority	East Sussex
Inspection number	10242151
Type of school	Special
School category	Academy special converter
Age range of pupils	4 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	97
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Jenny Smith
Headteacher	John Anderson
Website	www.torfield-saxonmount.com
Date of previous inspection	19 and 20 September 2017, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- Most pupils who attend Torfield School have autism spectrum disorder or speech, language and communication difficulties. A smaller proportion of pupils have moderate learning difficulties or social, emotional and mental health needs. Some pupils also have significant medical needs. All pupils who attend Torfield School have an EHC plan.
- The school is a split-site school. The majority of the children attend the Croft Road site. There are three classes at the Parker Road site, including provision for children in early years.
- The school is part of The Torfield and Saxon Mount Academy Trust, which was established in October 2014.
- A new headteacher took up post in September 2020.
- The school does not use any alternative provision.
- Inspectors were aware during this inspection of a serious incident involving a child who used to attend this school that had occurred since the previous inspection. While Ofsted does not have the power to investigate incidents of this kind, actions taken by the school in response to this incident were considered alongside the other evidence available at the time of the inspection to inform inspectors' judgements. The serious incident did not happen at school.

Information about this inspection

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- During the inspection, inspectors held meetings with senior leaders, subject leaders, class teachers and pupils. The lead inspector met with the CEO and trust directors, and spoke with a representative from East Sussex local authority.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors scrutinised a range of documentation, including the single central record of recruitment checks, and spoke with leaders, staff and pupils about their understanding and feelings of safety.
- The inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics, physical education and music. For each deep dive, inspectors met with subject leaders, reviewed curriculum plans, visited a sample of lessons, met with teachers, spoke with pupils about their learning and reviewed samples of pupils' work. The lead inspector listened to pupils reading aloud to members of school staff.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour at the start of the school day, during lessons and as they moved around the school throughout the day. Inspectors spoke to pupils and leaders about expectations for behaviour.
- Inspectors reviewed a wide range of the school's documentation, including self-evaluation and school improvement documentation, and minutes of trust board and advisory board meetings. Inspectors also reviewed planning for the academic and personal development curriculums, including plans and systems for implementing pupils EHC plans.
- Inspectors considered the views of parents who they spoke with during the inspection, as well as views expressed through the confidential questionnaire, Ofsted Parent View. Inspectors evaluated the views of staff, through meetings and via the Ofsted online questionnaires.

Inspection team

Hilary Macdonald, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Louise Ling

Ofsted Inspector

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