

Inspection of Topcliffe CofE Academy

School Lane, Topcliffe, Thirsk, North Yorkshire YO7 3RG

Inspection dates:	23 and 29 April 2025
The quality of education	Outstanding
Behaviour and attitudes	Outstanding
Personal development	Outstanding
Leadership and management	Outstanding
Early years provision	Outstanding
Previous inspection grade	Good

The executive headteacher of this school is Abigail Clay, who is responsible for this school and one other. This school is part of Elevate Multi Academy Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer (CEO), Nigel Ashley, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by John Brear.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils at Topcliffe CofE Academy are proud, well-mannered and eloquent members of the school community. The relationships that pupils develop throughout their time at Topcliffe are exceptionally warm and positive. Within the caring and compassionate environment of the school, pupils of all ages blossom. Topcliffe's motto of 'growing, believing, achieving together' forms the basis of the high-quality provision that pupils enjoy.

The school has high expectations for academic achievement, behaviour and pupils' wider development. Dedicated staff give pupils every chance to achieve well. Pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), meet these expectations.

Pupils care for one another. They have an exceptional understanding of, and respect for, difference. Pupils talk clearly about the difference between equality and equity. Where pupils may need some additional support, other pupils are adamant that 'we give them the support they need'. Well-trained, vigilant staff ensure that pupils are safe.

The highly inclusive environment within the school extends to parents and carers. They are very complimentary about the school. Parents value the support the school provides for pupils with SEND. One parent captured the views of many in describing how their child 'thrives in the environment created by staff'.

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

Over time, the school has designed and developed a high-quality curriculum with pupils' needs and interests at its core. Pupils engage well with this curriculum. This leads to them achieving highly across different subject areas. This includes pupils with SEND, whose needs are identified swiftly and addressed effectively.

Pupils demonstrate a deep understanding of their learning and of the concepts they have learned about. For example, the youngest children in Seedlings class make tiny boats from corks using their well-developed motor skills. They then experiment to find the best way to make these boats move down a guttering 'river' they have made. Other pupils study impressionist art. They use appropriate vocabulary to describe what they are seeing. Older pupils demonstrate an exemplary recall of longer-term learning. They use this to offer balanced oral debates, such as whether the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki were justified in the Second World War, or whether it would be better to be an Athenian or a Spartan in Ancient Greece. The work that pupils complete in their books is of an exceptional standard.

From the children's earliest days in nursery, skilled staff provide numerous opportunities for meaningful learning through play. The very youngest children in the two-year-old provision quickly develop independence. They navigate the provision with confidence. Staff expertly probe children's understanding through questioning. Language and vocabulary acquisition are high priorities. The well-planned and richly resourced provision prepares children well for the next stage of their education.

Highly effective phonics teaching ensures that pupils at the early stages of learning to read build a secure base of phonics knowledge. This allows them to develop into confident, fluent and voracious readers. If pupils begin to fall behind, well-trained staff use effective support to allow pupils to catch up.

Pupils' behaviour and conduct are exceptional. Respect for all is tangible throughout school. Leaders have carefully crafted a harmonious environment at Topcliffe, where pupils feel valued. Consequently, attendance is high. The support for pupils who may occasionally struggle to regulate their emotions is highly effective.

An exceptional programme for pupils' wider development exists at Topcliffe. No opportunity is missed to ensure that pupils have a wide and rich programme of experiences. These support and develop pupils' awareness of their place within the school, the wider community and the wider world. These experiences also give pupils numerous opportunities to develop spiritually, morally and culturally. For example, pupils visit a gurdwara, a mosque and a synagogue. This gives them a firm understanding and appreciation of different faiths and religions. Of the many responsibilities that pupils enjoy in school, the 'buddy' system between pupils in Year 6 and their younger counterparts in Reception is especially impactful. This allows pupils to forge highly positive relationships with younger children. Older pupils relish being role models. The 'military club' in school is highly regarded by parents who serve in the armed forces. A 'British Sign Language club' offers pupils a rewarding life experience.

Leaders at all levels have a well-developed understanding of all aspects of the school's work. Governors use a wealth of information to probe expertly and hold leaders to account. Governors and trustees fulfil their roles with diligence. As a result of the school placing high regard on staff workload and well-being, staff are highly motivated and passionate about the school.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

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	144840
Local authority	North Yorkshire
Inspection number	10394086
Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	2 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	121
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	John Brear
CEO of the trust	Nigel Ashley
Headteacher	Abigail Clay (Executive Headteacher)
Website	www.topcliffeacademy.org
Date of previous inspection	4 March 2020, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school is one of 18 academies in Elevate Multi Academy Trust.
- The school has provision for two-year-olds.
- The school does not use alternative provision.
- Wraparound childcare operates on site under the management of the school.
- As the school is designated as having a religious character, it is also inspected under section 48 of the Education Act 2005. The last such inspection took place in January 2024. The school's next section 48 inspection is due before January 2029.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. During a graded inspection, we grade the school for each of our key judgements (quality of education; behaviour and attitudes; personal development; and leadership and management) and for any relevant provision judgement (early years and/or sixth form

provision). Schools receiving a graded inspection from September 2024 will not be given an overall effectiveness grade.

- Inspections are a point-in-time evaluation about the quality of a school's education provision.
- This was the first inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- The inspection started on 23 April 2025. It was paused in line with [Ofsted inspections and visits: Deferring, pausing and gathering additional evidence](#) policy. An inspector returned on 29 April 2025 to complete the inspection.
- Inspectors met with the executive headteacher, other senior leaders, some other school staff, members of the local governing body, representatives of the trust and a representative of the Diocese of York.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics and art and design. For each deep dive, inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- An inspector also looked at samples of pupils' work in a wider range of other subjects and spoke to pupils about their learning.
- An inspector listened to some pupils from Years 1, 2 and 3 reading to a familiar adult.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspectors: reviewed the single central record; 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.
- The inspectors considered the responses to the online survey, Ofsted Parent View, including the free-text comments.
- Inspectors spoke to some parents.
- Inspectors considered the responses to the online staff and pupil questionnaires and spoke to some staff about their workload and well-being.

Inspection team

Richard Beadnall, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Alison Ashworth

Ofsted Inspector

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