

INSPECTION REPORT

TORFIELD SCHOOL

HASTINGS

LEA area: East Sussex

Unique reference number: 114690

Headteacher: Mr. C. D. Owen

Reporting inspector: Mr. R. Passant - 2728

Dates of inspection: 4th to 6th June 2001.

Inspection number: 192356

Short inspection carried out under section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Special
School category:	Community special
Age range of pupils:	3 to 11
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	Croft Road, Hastings.
Postcode:	TN34 3JT
Telephone number:	01424 428228
Fax number:	01424 712322
Appropriate authority:	The Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Councillor T. May
Date of previous inspection:	17 TH February 1997

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Torfield School is a maintained special school for boys and girls with learning difficulties. The nature of the school has undergone considerable change reflecting the changing nature of special schools within the authority. About one-third of the pupils have moderate learning difficulties whilst the other pupils have a range of more complex difficulties, including those relating to speech and language or autism. There were 94 pupils on roll at the time of the inspection, the majority of whom were of white U.K. heritage. The number on roll varies but is usually approximately 100. About half the pupils are eligible for free school meals. Two pupils speak English as an additional language.

All the pupils have statements of special educational needs. About two-thirds of the pupils come from Hastings and St. Leonard's whilst the others travel from the surrounding rural areas. The school is a participating partner school in the local Education Action Zone initiative. The school also participates in the Early Years Development Child Care Partnership, a government scheme to network early years initiatives. It also provides specialist support to other schools in the Local Education Authority.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

Torfield is a very effective and successful school. It is a very calm community with a friendly but purposeful ethos focused on pupils' learning. Overall, pupils make good progress against their targets because of the good quality teaching and staff members' very good knowledge of the pupils and their needs. All adults working in the school are very committed to the pupils. The leadership of the school by the headteacher and senior managers is very good. Throughout the school, there is a professional commitment to develop and improve the school to meet the pupils' often more complex needs. The school provides good value for money in terms of the progress pupils make and the quality of education that is provided.

What the school does well

- The quality of teaching is of good quality;
- The high quality of relationships provides a very good foundation for learning;
- Overall, pupils make good progress against their targets;
- There is very effective leadership, strong teamwork and commitment to improvement.
- The provision for pupils with additional special educational needs is very good.

What could be improved

- Aspects of the organisation of the school day to ensure that time is always used to best effect.

The areas for improvement will form the basis of the action plan prepared by the appropriate authority.

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school has made good improvement since it was last inspected in February 1997. The quality of teaching and teacher planning has improved and, consequently, pupils are achieving well. Teachers are clear about exactly what it is they are teaching. The National Strategies for Numeracy and Literacy have been implemented effectively. Individual education plans have been refined and improved. The issues identified in the report have been addressed well.

STANDARDS

The table summarises inspectors' judgements about how well pupils achieve in relation to their individual targets by the time they leave the school.

Progress in:	by age 5	by age 11	Key	
speaking and listening	B	B	very good	A
reading	B	B	good	B
writing	B	B	satisfactory	C
mathematics	B	B	unsatisfactory	D
personal, social and health education	B	B	poor	E
other personal targets set at annual reviews or in IEPs ¹	B	B		

The characteristics of the pupils for whom the school provides make it inappropriate to report attainment against national expectations. Judgements about what pupils achieve are based on the progress they make in relation to past attainments and capabilities, their statements of educational need and their individual education plans. Because of the nature of their difficulties, pupils' progress varies in terms of the size of the steps made in their learning. Some pupils make significant steps in their learning whilst for others the gains are smaller. Overall, pupils make good progress against their individualised targets.

Pupils achieve well across the curriculum. Pupils for whom it is appropriate are entered for National Curriculum tests and individual pupils achieve considerable personal success. In the 2000 National Curriculum tests for eleven-year-olds, three pupils achieved Level 3 in English; four pupils achieved the same level in mathematics and ten pupils gained Level 3 in science. One pupil achieved Level 4 in mathematics (the level expected for eleven year-olds) and three pupils achieved the same level in science. By the end of Year 6 almost every pupil is able to swim 25 metres.

Pupils' progress is monitored closely. Pupils with additional special needs make good and sometimes very good progress.

Across the school, expectations of what individuals can do and achieve are high.

¹ IEP is the term used to describe a pupil's individual education plan

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Pupils' attitudes to learning are good and often very good. They are interested in what they are asked to do and some pupils can concentrate for a sustained period and try very hard.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Members of staff are skilled at managing pupils' behaviour and at maintaining a calm purposeful atmosphere in the school. Behaviour is good.
Personal development and relationships	Relationships between staff and pupils are very good and provide the foundation for the learning. Members of staff work hard to help pupils understand the impact of their action on others. Given that some pupils find relationships difficult, relationships between pupils are good overall. The school has an inclusive ethos.
Attendance	Overall, attendance is satisfactory.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	aged up to 5	aged 5-11
Lessons seen overall	good	good

Inspectors make judgements about teaching in the range: excellent; very good; good; satisfactory; unsatisfactory; poor; very poor. 'Satisfactory' means that the teaching is adequate and strengths outweigh weaknesses.

Teaching was very good in 25 per cent, good in 55 per cent and satisfactory in 20 per cent in the sample of lessons seen. No teaching was unsatisfactory.

Overall, teaching is good and the high proportion of good quality teaching ensures that, although progress depends on the individual, overall, pupils make good progress against their targets. The quality of teaching of English, mathematics and science is good, as is the development of communication skills. Literacy and numeracy are supported well across the curriculum. Personal, social and health education is interwoven into the ethos of the school and teaching is good. Teachers have very good knowledge of the pupils and their particular needs and they plan the work well to ensure that it matches these needs. Knowledge about additional special needs, such as autism and speech and language disorders, is very good and a strength of the school. Teachers adopt a sensitive but challenging approach. All adults are very committed to the pupils and have high expectations of what individual pupils can achieve.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Overall, the curriculum is broad and reasonably balanced. It fulfils the requirements to teach all subjects of the National Curriculum and is very relevant to the needs of the pupils. The way time is used during the school day requires review to ensure that the best use is made of the teaching time available.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	The two pupils who have English as an additional language needs are well supported and make very good progress.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Overall, there is good provision. The moral code is strong and there is very good provision for social development. Assemblies are an important element in the school day and provide a good context for spiritual development. The cultural provision is good. The school works hard to develop pupils' confidence and self-esteem.
How well the school cares for its pupils	The school takes very great care of all its pupils and is very aware of child protection issues. There is a very high level of supervision and support to pupils at play and lunchtime and when pupils arrive and leave the school at the end of the day. Members of staff are alert to possible dangers. Assessment - measuring small step achievement - is developing well. There are very good links with specialist Local Education Authority agencies.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The overall quality of leadership of the school by the headteacher and senior management is very good. The headteacher has established strong teamwork and commitment which is focused on the pupils and ensuring that they make the best possible progress. Members of staff have responded well to the changing nature of the school. There is a clear vision for the school's development
How well the appropriate authority fulfils its responsibilities	The Governing Body is effective. It is fully involved and very supportive of the school. Members bring a range of personal and professional skills and are involved in establishing priorities and monitoring the work of the school.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Overall, this is particularly effective and is built into the school improvement planning process. Teaching is monitored effectively and regularly by members of the senior management team and subject co-ordinators. The improved and improving assessment system is allowing the school to monitor pupils' progress more accurately and to compare pupils' progress with another similar school as a means of monitoring standards and determining the impact and value that the school is adding. The school makes good use of parent questionnaires to evaluate the effectiveness of, for example, communication. Members of the senior management team have attended training in school self-evaluation.
The strategic use of resources	Resources are used well

The school is careful how it spends its money. It seeks to ensure it obtains the best value from any expenditure.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Their children like school and are making good progress.• The school is helping their children to become mature and responsible.• The quality of teaching is good.• The school is easy to approach.• The school is well led.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Homework.• Extra-curricular activities.• The amount of speech therapy.

Parents have a very positive view of the school which is supported by the inspection. Homework is set and is tailored to the needs of the pupils. There is a homework policy. With regard to extra-curricular activities the school does offer a good range of activities given the constraints of travelling - indeed teachers voluntarily drive children home after activities. At the parents' meeting there was a concern about the lack of speech therapy. The school has now made its own arrangements and the amount of speech therapy offered has increased.

PART B: COMMENTARY

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

The quality of teaching is of good quality

1. Teachers know the pupils well and present the work with energy and enthusiasm which engages pupils' interest in the work. They have a good knowledge of the particular needs of the pupils as expressed in the individual education plans and planning to meet the varying needs of pupils is good. For example, in one lesson the procedures outlined in a pupil's behaviour plan were followed very closely. Teachers have not only good subject knowledge but also good knowledge about aspects of special education, such as autism. This allows the teachers to be very supportive but also at the same time allows them to challenge the pupils appropriately and sensitively. Expectations about what the pupils can achieve are high across the school.

2. For example, in a very good mathematics lesson with older pupils there was a very brisk and lively start to the lesson which engaged pupils' interest and carried them along. The teacher was always ready to challenge the pupils to extend themselves, with a word of praise for a good attempt even if the answer was not correct. She encouraged the pupils to explain how they saw the patterns in the numbers. (The class were adding various combinations $8 + 2 = 10$, $80 + 20 = 100$, $7 + 3 = 10$, $70 + ? = 100$.) Pupils were encouraged also not to be anxious about making a mistake so that they were enabled to think through the problem, explain and convey their learning to others. All pupils were given an opportunity to answer because questions were carefully directed to individual pupils. Very good links were made throughout the lesson to work in other lessons. Pupils enjoyed the effervescent teaching and the resultant very good pace. This kept pupils on task and working productively but it also ensured that they concentrated well and were made to think carefully about what they were doing. Not only did the pupils make very good progress in the lesson but the whole ethos and atmosphere also ensured that pupils enjoyed their mathematics and wanted to do well.

3. In a very good literacy lesson the teacher read very well from 'Alligator Pie' with pupils filling in the rhyming word. For example, 'Don't put mustard in the custard.' The teacher was skilled at making the transition to the next phase of the lesson and focusing the class's attention on the use of the comma. Questioning, as in other lessons, was skilled and praise used well. A pupil suggested that 'a comma gives you a breather' and this response from the individual pupil was valued, used and referred to later in the lesson. Planning was very detailed and classroom organisation and pupil management skilled.

4. Across the school, there is good teamwork with classroom assistants and they use their time well. In the lesson described above, for example, the classroom assistant anticipated the difficulties an individual pupil was having and in association with a colleague ensured that all pupils, including a pupil with additional specific special needs, were fully involved in the lesson.

5. The quality of teacher planning has improved since the previous inspection. Teachers now clearly define what it is they want the pupils to learn in the lesson and the planning does not, for example, simply identify the range of activities to be undertaken. Because of this clarity of purpose and the often lively and skilful questioning which reminds pupils effectively of what they were doing in the previous lesson, pupils have a good understanding of what it is they are to do. Similarly, towards the end of lessons the whole-class review of the lesson often very effectively reinforces the main teaching points of the lesson.

6. The characteristics described in the two examples quoted above are present in varying degrees in most lessons. Pupils know what it is they have to do and they are reminded of how this links to previous work; the activity is clearly defined and matched well to the needs of all pupils because of careful planning and knowledge of the pupils; at the end of the lesson there is effective review to reinforce the learning. In addition, very effective class management and the use of praise fosters pupils' confidence which, along with the liveliness of the teaching, ensures that pupils are motivated and want to do well. Consequently, pupils make good progress overall.

The high quality of relationships provides a very good foundation for learning

7. All adults working in the school show, to a very high degree, care, concern and commitment towards the pupils in their charge. Adults give every appearance of knowing all the pupils and the sense of tranquillity that exists within the school stems from the fact that adults anticipate the tensions pupils might have rather than react to them.

8. Adults are kind, welcoming and interested. They show particular patience and are skilled at managing behaviour in a positive manner, for example on the playground. The school takes very great care of the pupils, ensuring their safety at all times but doing so, often, in a quiet unobtrusive manner. All adults are very good role models for the pupils. They speak in a kindly manner and are punctilious in their politeness. In their turn, pupils respond with equal courtesy and appear to trust the adults.

9. An ethos which supports learning is established as a result of the consistently high quality relationships that exist. Teachers, and classroom assistants know the pupils well. They are committed to the pupils and establish a very high standard of care whilst fostering independence. They show very real support for individual pupils yet know when to challenge them. Across the school, pupils are managed and supported with sensitivity matched by appropriately high expectations of what a particular individual can achieve, based on knowledge of that individual.

Overall, pupils make good progress against their targets

10. Pupils have a range of learning difficulties and, because of this, an individual pupil's progress varies in terms of the size of the steps made and the amount of progress a pupil makes over time. Some pupils make very significant strides in their learning whilst for others the steps in learning are much smaller. Overall, however, pupils make good progress against their targets.

11. Two of the most important features contributing to the overall good progress of pupils at Torfield have been identified already. These are the good quality of teaching and the purposeful ethos which results from the quality of relationships between adults and pupils existing in the school. There are, however a number of other significant factors.

12. The first of these stems from the central focus that the school has on the quality of learning that is taking place and a professional climate that considers carefully the best approach to be made with individual pupils.

13. Comparison with national averages is inappropriate for many pupils at Torfield School. The headteacher and the Governing Body have to use other indicators to determine whether the school is making a difference, whether it is 'adding value'. A key factor for the school, is not the raw attainment levels that pupils reach but the progress that pupils achieve and whether the rate of progress is as good as it could be.

14. The school sees itself as providing a specialist facility within a spectrum of provision provided by the local education authority. The headteacher and the governing body have developed a vision of the school's development within that provision but also, significantly, established within the school a strong culture of corporate accountability for the progress pupils are making. The school has developed and is continuing to develop its assessment strategies to measure achievement in small steps so that it can monitor even more effectively the progress pupils are making and can compare that progress with other schools which have pupils who have a similar range of difficulties. In the process of achieving this, all staff are focused on the quality of learning and the progress that is taking place. This has led to a professional climate where teachers consider carefully what they are doing.

15. A second additional factor is the improvement that has taken place since the last inspection in the quality of individual education plans which are drawn up for pupils. These provide the specific targets for pupil progress.

16. A final additional factor is that not only do teachers present the work in a lively and enthusiastic manner but they work hard to ensure that the work is relevant and interesting. A history lesson, for example, was based around an archaeological 'dig' where pupils discover a range of artefacts, leading to an understanding how we find out about history. A gaming approach, using a 'Mexican Wave' helped establish a number sequence. Pupils were asked to discover a pattern in x 4 table rather than simply chanting the numbers and in science an active approach was used to help pupils identify the differences between plants and cacti, enjoying the scents of lemon balm and mint.

There is very effective leadership, strong teamwork and commitment to improvement.

17. The leadership by the headteacher is very good. There is a clear vision for the school and its development. The headteacher has established a strong team of staff who share his commitment to do the best by the pupils. There is particularly effective and complementary professional support from the deputy head and the senior management team. Together they have ensured that the school has not only made good progress since the last inspection, but also adapted well to the changing nature of its pupils. They have coped well with demanding the day-to-day contingencies of managing the school through its recent major building programme and an initial drop in pupil numbers and consequent financial difficulties, which have been resolved. The governing body emphasised in discussion that it had been a particularly stressful period for all members of staff. Despite the difficulties, there is in the school an optimism and a good commitment to improving the school further.

18. Subject co-ordinators manage their subject well. The relevant co-ordinators have observed teaching in literacy and numeracy and used the subsequent evaluation to inform the subject development planning. The headteacher has a collegiate style and members of staff are therefore encouraged to play an active role in school improvement. Across the school, the feeling of teamwork is strong and continues to develop. Members of staff provide each other with effective mutual support. The role of the classroom assistant is valued within the school. They work well in class and around the school enhancing the pupils' learning opportunities.

19. The school's climate of corporate accountability for the progress pupils make leads to a focus by staff on the quality of learning which is taking place. The school is reflective about what it does and is very committed to ensuring that pupils achieve their best. The consequence is that training and professional development opportunities, for example through the school's outreach work and contribution to the Education Action Zone, as well as through the conventional in-service opportunities, are given a high priority.

The provision for pupils with additional special educational needs is very good.

20. The provision for pupils with additional special needs, for example, pupils on the autistic spectrum, or with speech and language disorders is very good and a strength of the school. The provision for pupils on the autistic spectrum is characterised by high teaching standards, very good knowledge of autism and a sensitive but challenging approach. The staff involved, both teachers and classroom assistants are very committed to the pupils. Parents value their contribution greatly and pupils make good, sometimes very good progress. Planning, recording and assessment are very good. Provision in the main school for pupils with additional difficulties is well organised and delivered with sensitivity. Expectations of pupils are high. Teachers plan work well and good teamwork with classroom assistants ensure that there is an inclusive ethos which ensures that pupils participate in lessons effectively and make good progress.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

Aspects of the organisation of the school day to ensure that time is always used to best effect.

21. Although, in the main, time is used well across the school day, there are some occasions when it is not used productively. In the few lessons seen, where progress was only satisfactory, this tended to be caused by the less effective use of time. In these lessons, whilst the actual teaching session was used well and teaching was conducted at a good pace, the time beforehand was used less valuably.

22. The concept of a 'transition time'- the period needed to resettle pupils from playtime for example, is appropriate with a small number of classes, particularly those with a significant number of pupils with additional special needs. For pupils on the autistic spectrum, for example, this 'transition time' is important. It provides the 'space', for example in the mornings, when they are introduced to the school again. Pupils arrive at school, upset, crying and shouting. All are very fragile emotionally and require a great deal of care. Over a period of ten to 15 minutes, pupils gradually become calmer and the morning 'Welcome' session can take place. However, in other classes such a 'space', particularly after morning playtime is not required. For the majority, the time in these transition sessions is not used well. For example, a physical education lesson, allocated 65 minutes on the timetable, actually lasted 33 minutes because of the 'transition' and the extended changing time.

23. The school sees opportunities to develop horse-riding skills as particularly important in the development of older pupils' confidence. The current provision is expensive in time. Currently, a morning is allocated to the activity to provide the necessary travelling time to and from the stables - which amounts to a considerable amount of relatively unproductive travelling time. The school needs to be very clear that the benefits the pupils gain from this and similar experiences justify the time investment and, is not, in fact, limiting opportunities in other areas of the curriculum.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

24. In order to build on the many and significant strengths of the school the headteacher and the Governing Body should ensure that:

the school day is organised to allow time to be used to best effect by:

- (i) reviewing how 'transition' time is used and its relevance to particular groups;
- (ii) evaluating carefully the balance between the pupils' progress which results from an activity against the 'cost' of unproductive travelling time in activities such as horse-riding.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	20
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	15

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
0	25	55	20	0	0	0

The table gives the percentage of teaching observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about lessons.

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	No of pupils
Number of pupils on the school's roll	94
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	47

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	2

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	26
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	1

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	6.9

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	1.2

Both tables give the percentage of half days (sessions) missed through absence for the latest complete reporting year.

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	1
Black – African heritage	
Black – other	1
Indian	
Pakistani	
Bangladeshi	1
Chinese	
White	91
Any other minority ethnic group	

Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage	0	0
Black – African heritage	0	0
Black – other	0	0
Indian	0	0
Pakistani	0	0
Bangladeshi	0	0
Chinese	0	0
White	1	0
Other minority ethnic groups	0	0

This table gives the number of exclusions, which may be different from the number of pupils excluded.

Teachers and classes**Qualified teachers and classes: YN– Y6**

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	14.7
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	6.4
Average class size	8.5

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Education support staff: YN – Y 6

Total number of education support staff	19
Total aggregate hours worked per week	511

Financial information

Financial year	2000/01
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	£
Total income	893628
Total expenditure	930968
Expenditure per pupil	9309
Balance brought forward from previous year	37340
Balance carried forward to next year	0

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	94
Number of questionnaires returned	35

Percentage² of responses in each category

	Strongl y agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	77	23	0	0	0
My child is making good progress in school.	59	35	6	0	0
Behaviour in the school is good.	33	55	3	0	9
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	28	40	20	0	12
The teaching is good.	82	12	3	0	3
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	63	29	9	0	0
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	77	20	0	0	3
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	58	39	3	0	0
The school works closely with parents.	59	35	6	0	0
The school is well led and managed.	71	23	3	0	3
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	58	39	3	0	0
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	47	19	6	3	25

² Results may not add up to 100 due to rounding