

Topcliffe Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	103307
Local Authority	Birmingham
Inspection number	286624
Inspection dates	19–20 June 2007
Reporting inspector	Arnalena Bee

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	250
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Elaine Spalding
Headteacher	Chris Robinson
Date of previous school inspection	1 February 2002
School address	Hawkinge Drive Castle Vale Birmingham B35 6BS
Telephone number	0121 6756296
Fax number	0121 7494268

Age group	4–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Topcliffe is an above average sized primary school. The children's levels of attainment, when they start school, are below those normally expected for four year olds. There is specialist provision in two classes for pupils who have speech and language difficulties. A few pupils from a local special school are taught in Key Stage 2. The proportion of pupils who are identified as having learning difficulties and disabilities is well above average. Most pupils are from White British backgrounds.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Topcliffe provides a satisfactory education for its pupils. Standards are broadly average at the end of Year 6 and pupils' achievement is satisfactory. Standards in reading and mathematics have risen this year but are below average in writing. Pupils' handwriting and punctuation are weak and they are given too few opportunities to practise writing skills in subjects other than literacy. Children in the Reception class make satisfactory progress overall, but good progress in their personal and social development. Teaching and learning are satisfactory but variations in the quality of teaching mean that some pupils do better than others. Pupils in Years 5 and 6 for instance, often achieve well because teaching is frequently better in that part of the school but elsewhere teachers do not consistently make sure that the activities they plan are suitable for the wide range of abilities found in their classes. Pupils with speech and language difficulties in the Resource Base classes achieve well because they receive good teaching.

A strength of the satisfactory curriculum is the wide range of visits out of school and visitors who come in. These have a positive effect on bringing learning to life as well as developing pupils' academic, personal and social skills. Pupils' personal development and well-being are satisfactory. Broadly average standards and good attitudes to learning are preparing pupils securely for secondary school and their future lives. Pupils enjoy all aspects of school life and although attendance is below average it is improving since it has become a school priority. A clear moral code underpins pupils' good behaviour. As a result, they are considerate to each other and polite to adults. Pupils make sensible choices about what they eat and take regular exercise. Care, guidance and support are satisfactory. The school links well with external agencies and parents. The support given to pupils with speech and language difficulties is especially good. Academic guidance for most pupils is less effective. Throughout the school pupils are not consistently informed about what they need to do to improve their work further.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. There have been recent changes in the leadership of the school. The acting headteacher, along with the local authority, has strengthened the management structure, which is now satisfactory. In a short period of time, the acting headteacher has established a commitment from the staff, in particular from the senior leaders and managers, to improve the education the school provides. Recently developed school improvement planning documents identify what needs to be done but lack specific detail to show how priorities are to be addressed and when they are to be completed by.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve pupils' writing by focusing more on basic punctuation and handwriting and by giving them more opportunities to practise their writing skills in all subjects. A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next Section 5 inspection.
- Ensure that teachers' planning contains activities that are carefully matched to the needs and understanding of all pupils.
- Make sure that pupils know what they need to do to improve their work.
- Improve school improvement planning documents so that staff and governors know exactly how areas for development should be dealt with and when they are to be completed by.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Standards at the end of Year 6 are average. They have improved in mathematics this year. Writing standards continue to be below average. Handwriting and punctuation skills are not well developed in all classes. Pupils' achievement, including pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities and those pupils who are integrated from the local special school, is satisfactory. School data show that achievement for the current Year 6 has been variable as they moved through Years 3 to 6. Pupils do better in Years 5 and 6 because the teaching is often good in these classes. Pupils with speech and language difficulties, who are taught in the Resource Base classes, achieve well because they receive good quality teaching and are well supported by the teaching assistants.

Standards in Year 2 are average. School data for 2007 show that standards in reading and mathematics have improved considerably since 2006. Standards in writing are below average. These pupils have made satisfactory progress in relation to their earlier attainment at the start of Year 1. Although the children in Reception Year do not reach the expected levels by the time they start in Year 1, their progress is satisfactory.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory. Pupils respect each other, adults and the world around them. Their understanding of other cultures is underdeveloped although they are tolerant of people with views and traditions different to their own. Pupils feel safe at school, know how to keep themselves safe and know that adults in school are there to help them if they have a problem. They readily accept responsibility as class monitors, playground leaders and members of the school council. They speak confidently about the work of the school council and appreciate the efforts the council is making on their behalf to purchase a fridge to keep their packed lunches fresh. Their contribution to the wider community is satisfactory. Pupils enthusiastically collect for charities but speak in a limited way about why they do this.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

There are inconsistencies in the quality of teaching and learning, for example, teachers do not use assessment information effectively when they plan activities. Some pupils find activities too easy whilst others find them too hard. Marking of pupils' work does not always inform pupils what they need to do to improve. Nevertheless, teaching has some good points. Most classes are well managed and relationships between pupils and all adults are good. Pupils have positive attitudes to learning and are generally keen and eager to please their teachers. Learning is better in Years 5 and 6 where planning is effective and activities matched well to pupils' specific needs. Teaching assistants are supportive to pupils' needs but the quality of the support they give is greatly dependent on how well the teacher has planned the lesson. Where teaching is good and activities are well matched to the needs of the pupils, the teaching assistants are able to support pupils well. In the Resource Base classes, teaching and learning are good.

Activities are well matched to pupils' needs, language is developed effectively and pupils are encouraged to practise their speaking skills in all that they do.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The children in the Reception class get off to a sound start because they receive an appropriate curriculum for their age. The curriculum supports and develops pupils' personal and social skills well and they learn to work and play together constructively. Exercise and physical skills are well developed in out-of-school clubs, including coaching by qualified Football Association coaches. Pupils with specific needs benefit greatly from the experiences they receive in school. The pupils in the two Resource Base classes are well provided for. Pupils from a local special school are well integrated into classes in Years 3 and 6. All subjects are taught and although pupils write freely in literacy sessions they do not have sufficient opportunities to use their writing skills to develop their ideas and understanding further in other subjects of the curriculum.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

There are good procedures for dealing with social and emotional problems in school. Pupils who have particular medical problems are supported effectively by the learning mentor and other adults. Pupils with concerns are encouraged to use the 'Problem Box' or if they find this too daunting, can e-mail the learning mentor confidentially. Procedures for child protection are satisfactory. Staff are aware of these procedures and use them in the course of their work. There are robust procedures to check the suitability of adults working in school. Health and safety and risk assessments ensure pupils are safe. Academic guidance is satisfactory. Targets have very recently been introduced for literacy and numeracy but not all pupils are aware of what their targets are. They have not been in place long enough to impact on pupils' achievement.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The acting headteacher has boosted staff morale and is popular with the parents. Although only in post a few weeks, he has encouraged the senior leaders and managers to work more co-operatively. The procedures to check pupils' progress are rigorous and have been particularly effective in raising standards in Year 6 and in Year 2. In addition, sound measures have been introduced to make sure that if pupils' progress slows, they are quickly identified and supported and put back on track. The systems to assess the quality of teaching are less effective than those for tracking pupils' progress. They do not place enough importance on the quality of learning. Subject leaders are starting to check progress in their subjects but are not yet involved in improving the quality of teaching. Despite these shortcomings, the school has an accurate overview of the quality of education it provides and improvement plans identify the right priorities. These plans are new and although they correctly identify what needs to be done, they lack detail in relation to how the priorities are to be dealt with, the timescale for completion and who is to be involved. Governance has improved since the last inspection and is satisfactory. Through their growing understanding of data, governors are beginning to challenge, as well as support the school with regard to its performance. Improvements since the last inspection and the recent rise in standards show the school has satisfactory capacity to improve further.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	3
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3
The behaviour of learners	2
The attendance of learners	3
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	3
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

20 June 2007

Dear Pupils

Topcliffe Primary School, Birmingham, B35 6BS

- Thank you for making us so welcome when we came to visit your school. We liked talking to you and thought that you behaved well, are kind to each other and polite to the adults who help you and to visitors. Your school, the people in charge and your teachers do a satisfactory job and this is helping you to make satisfactory progress and reach broadly average standards by the time you leave in Year 6. What we like about your school:
- You know that if you have a problem there is always someone who will listen to you.
- You are keen and eager to learn and work hard in lessons.
- You have a good idea of the importance of eating healthily and keeping yourselves safe.
- Teaching is often good in Years 5 and 6 so older pupils often do well.
- Those of you who are in the Resource Base classes make good progress because you are taught well.
- To make the school even better, we have asked the people in charge and your teachers to work together on four things:
- Make sure that in all lessons, everyone gets activities that are not too hard or too easy.
- Check that you all know what you have to do to improve your work.
- Plan more writing activities for you in lessons other than literacy so that everyone gets better at writing.
- Make the planning documents clearer so that all adults who use them know what they have to do and when they have to get things done.

Keep smiling and working hard.

Yours sincerely

Nina Bee Lead Inspector