



Torfield School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 114690
Local Authority East Sussex
Inspection number 290001
Inspection date 6 February 2007
Reporting inspector Mike Kell

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

Type of school	Special	School address	Croft Road
School category	Community		Hastings
Age range of pupils	4–11		TN34 3JT
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01424 428228
Number on roll (school)	72	Fax number	01424 428228
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Gina Sexton
		Headteacher	Jean Mockford
Date of previous school inspection	4 June 2001		

Age group	Inspection date	Inspection number
4–11	6 February 2007	290001

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The school is on two sites: a main school site and the nurture centre, which is approximately a mile away. All the pupils have a statement of special educational need. Just over half of the pupils have autism. Most of the others have moderate learning difficulties. A small number of pupils have speech or communication difficulties. There are a few pupils with severe learning difficulties and emotional and behavioural difficulties. The youngest pupils, who have autism and associated complex needs, are based at the nurture centre.

There are very many more boys than girls on roll. Virtually all the pupils have a White British background, speaking English as their first language. A small number are in public care. Approximately a quarter are eligible for free school meals. A change in the local authority's policy on including pupils with learning difficulties in mainstream schools has resulted in an uneven age spread of pupils. There are very few in Reception and Years 1 and 2.

There have been significant management changes since the last inspection. Prior to the current headteacher taking up post just over a year ago, there were two permanent headteachers and two acting headteachers during this period. The school's leaders also manage an inclusion team that is part of the local authority's provision for supporting pupils with autism in mainstream schools, but the work of this team did not feature in the inspection.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

The parent who commented 'Torfield is a warm, friendly, nurturing, approachable school' made an astute observation. Torfield is a good school with outstanding links with partners such as parents, health professionals and local schools. As a result, it is successful in meeting the learning and personal needs of its pupils. The pupils are safe and very well looked after. They receive an outstanding level of care, guidance and support. As a result, their personal development is excellent. The pupils enjoy school immensely. They make excellent progress in developing their understanding of a safe and healthy lifestyle.

The pupils' attainment is exceptionally low compared with national expectations, as a result of their learning difficulties. The small number of children in the Foundation Stage receive an exceptionally good education in an extremely well organised and supportive environment. As a result, they make excellent progress in their communication, personal and social skills. This provides a highly effective platform for learning. All the pupils in Years 1 to 6 make good progress from their starting points, irrespective of their age or the nature of their learning need. All the pupils achieve well in meeting their targets in individual education plans (IEPs) and in attaining P levels or, in some cases, National Curriculum levels. This is because the school skilfully balances the pupils' learning with encouraging all features of their personal development.

The pupils' learning is good because they are taught well and they receive a good curriculum. Teachers' use of information and communication technology (ICT) and their adeptness in using different communication approaches engage and motivate the pupils. The curriculum is well structured, with many opportunities for the pupils' learning to be enriched through links with the local and wider communities. Overall curriculum planning is detailed, but daily planning is less effective as not all teachers routinely identify what individual pupils or small groups are expected to learn in each lesson. Consequently, learning activities do not always match individual pupils' needs and so teaching assistants are sometimes uncertain about their exact role in providing support for learning.

Leadership and management are good. School leaders have a good understanding of their school, based on refined systems for finding out how well it is doing. Senior leaders have an outstanding commitment to equality of opportunity. This has been a very important factor in establishing a school in which all the pupils are highly valued as individuals.

What the school should do to improve further

- write lesson plans that routinely identify what individual pupils or groups are expected to learn and provide activities that meet more closely the learning needs of each pupil.
- clarify the role of teaching assistants in supporting learning.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

All the pupils achieve well even though their standards are exceptionally low compared with national expectations. The pupils make good progress towards meeting their learning targets in IEPs. These are generally appropriate and sufficiently challenging. The pupils also make good progress towards meeting nationally agreed levels of attainment, such as P levels or, in some cases, National Curriculum levels.

The pupils' good academic progress stems from the exceptional improvements that they make in their behaviour, attitudes, social awareness and communication skills. This put them in a very good position to learn. Children in the Foundation Stage flourish in a very structured environment that encourages them to come to terms with 'getting things wrong' and taking turns. These young children improve their communication skills considerably. Older pupils, especially those with autism, build on this, learning to work alongside others, collaboratively or more independently. This has a positive influence on the progress they make. Consequently, pupils with communication difficulties or more complex needs use a symbols program to write stories independently on a computer and others work as a group, making predictions before a mathematics investigation. The oldest pupils develop a good understanding of the wider world, such as being able to recognise and name a mango when studying Africa.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

The pupils make outstanding progress in all aspects of their personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. This occurs because the school is highly successful in helping the pupils to modify their behaviour, to accept change more readily and to improve their social skills. As a result, they really enjoy learning, behave exceptionally well and have excellent attitudes to their learning. Consequently, they attend school regularly. The pupils show an outstanding ability to make healthy, safe and sensible decisions, such as choosing the healthy food option at lunch time. They look forward to their physical education and swimming lessons because they have a very good understanding about how this helps them to keep fit. The pupils also know the rules for staying safe and are very adept at applying them.

Adults provide excellent role models and there is a consistent focus on high quality social interactions. Consequently, the pupils grow in confidence, their self-esteem rises and they become more confident communicators. They become increasingly able to contribute to the life of the school. Their ability to work with their classmates, support one another and to celebrate others' success is excellent. Many get an opportunity to express their views on the school council. They were very active contributors to a discussion about the refreshments that would be served to visitors at the opening of the sensory garden. Opportunities such as this help to prepare the pupils very well for getting ready for the next stage of their education. Their preparation for future life is also promoted exceptionally well through activities that develop their

social and financial awareness, such as visiting the shops and paying for goods and helping to plan and prepare budgets for residential trips.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teachers manage their pupils very well, with high expectations of behaviour so that lessons are calm and purposeful. They use a variety of approaches that effectively meet the needs of different groups of pupils. For instance, pupils with autism generally follow well-established routines but they are also put into situations where they have to deal with and accept change. Teachers plan situations in which the pupils with speech and communication difficulties might have to work closely with others, such as a group composition in music, whilst at other times they expect them to work independently or with minimum support. By doing so, teachers successfully extend the range of the pupils' learning and promote their social skills very effectively.

However, their day-to-day lesson planning does not always focus on what they expect individual pupils to learn in each lesson. Nor do all teachers routinely identify specific activities that will encourage small gains in learning. In addition, teaching assistants do not always fully appreciate their precise role in supporting learning. Nevertheless, lessons are lively and teachers' effective use of different communication strategies ensures that all the pupils are involved and helped to make good gains in learning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The children in the Foundation Stage follow an excellent curriculum. It is very carefully structured, organised and taught in a way that makes the most of the children's different sensory approaches to learning. The children's learning is supported by excellent resources and a stimulating environment.

Older pupils also benefit from very good quality accommodation and resources. The school has recently structured its curriculum around blocks of work based on a theme, which this term is 'blue'. Good planning helps makes learning more meaningful because learning is reinforced by all the different subjects, whilst a primary focus on developing the key skills of literacy, numeracy and ICT is maintained. A further strength of planning is the way that it shows, in broad terms, what the pupils are expected to know at the end of each block of work. However, these broad aims are not broken down in the short-term planning in a way that shows what individuals or groups of pupils might be expected to learn.

The curriculum to support pupils' personal, social and health education is very good. This, coupled with the very well planned specialist provision in the nurture centre, makes a significant contribution to the pupils' excellent personal development. The school also provides many enrichment activities and uses the community very well to provide numerous off-site visits. These include horse riding, rebound therapy, dance,

theatre visits, musical events and a residential trip for the older pupils, which are not only very enjoyable but also add much to the pupils' social and cultural understanding. Currently, there are very limited opportunities for individual pupils to be included in classes in mainstream schools, but the school is working hard to address this issue.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The school is a very safe and caring community. All the appropriate policies and procedures for safeguarding pupils are in place and they are implemented robustly. Very close liaison with partners contributes greatly to the guidance that the school provides for families and their children. For instance, speech and language therapists work very closely with teachers in order to ensure a consistent approach to each pupil's communication programme. The school also works very closely with other agencies so that looked-after pupils receive excellent support and guidance.

The school is very successful in guiding its pupils to become more aware of others and to communicate in ways that are socially acceptable. Individual behaviour plans and IEP targets show that adults have a very detailed understanding of the status of each pupil's personal development. Staff provide excellent guidance and support in the way that they adjust the level of challenge that the targets present so that pupils make great strides in their personal development. Senior staff monitor incidents carefully and staff use this information to minimise those situations that might trigger a pupil to behave inappropriately. The pupils receive very strong support in developing their confidence and their ability to contribute to decision-making processes that affect them, such as at annual reviews of their statement of special educational need. The pupils receive good guidance about how they can improve the quality of their work. As assessment procedures have become more robust, teachers now know their pupils' achievements in detail and they are beginning to use this information to help their pupils to move forward.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The senior staff team is relatively new but has quickly established an effective programme for monitoring and evaluating the school's work. As a result, the school's leaders developed a good understanding of what improvements needed to be made in order to meet the needs of the school's changing population. These included developing the accommodation by establishing a sensory pool, a soft play area and a sensory room in order to enhance some pupils' multi-sensory approach to learning. Professional development became more focused in order to give staff and governors an increased awareness of autism, and leaders greatly strengthened the links with speech and language therapists to promote the pupils' communication skills. These developments have had a significant impact on the pupils' achievements and personal development so there has been good improvement since the last inspection.

Senior leaders are very responsive to individuals and groups of pupils and go out of their way to ensure that all pupils, whatever their difficulties, are welcomed and highly valued. For instance, they examine assessment data carefully to ensure that no group, such as those with a particular learning difficulty, is underperforming compared with others. Strong leadership has set a clear and well thought out future direction for the school. A commitment to encouraging everyone to contribute to the school's development has borne fruit. The school has produced a detailed and ambitious improvement plan and staff are embracing the changes that this requires. As a result, the school is well placed to move forward as all staff and an effective governing body have a shared sense of purpose.

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	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?	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The behaviour of learners	1
The attendance of learners	2
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

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.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
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

Thank you very much for the welcome that you gave us when we visited your school. We enjoyed talking with you and watching you in lessons and at break times.

Torfield is a good school. Good teaching means that you learn a lot in lessons and the teachers give you many interesting things to do. A good curriculum and lots of visits and exciting activities, such as horse riding, also help you to learn. As a result, you do well.

All the adults in your school look after you very carefully. The school is a very safe place. Everyone helps you a great deal and so you do very well in learning about how to mix with other people and how to talk to them properly. You become more confident and do more and more things for yourself, such as making very sensible choices about keeping fit and staying safe. Many of you help others as well, such as when you are on the school council. The school does a great deal to help to get you ready for your next school. You do lots to help yourselves. You all go to school as much as you can and your behaviour is excellent. It was very good to see how much you enjoy your lessons and how hard you work.

The senior staff do a good job in running the school and they want to make it even better. We have given them some ideas to help:

- in every lesson, your teachers should plan exactly what they want each one of you to learn and give each one of you work that is just right for you so that you can learn as much as possible
- in lessons, the teachers should make certain that the teaching assistants help you learn even more.

Thank you once again. We wish you the best of luck in the future.