

# Topcliffe Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School

## Inspection report

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Unique Reference Number	121522
Local authority	North Yorkshire
Inspection number	327504
Inspection dates	17–18 June 2009
Reporting inspector	Mr Clive Petts

The inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 under pilot arrangements; it was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

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Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	110
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Stephen Peters
Headteacher	Mrs Wendy Shepherd
Date of previous school inspection	March 2006
School address	School Lane Topcliffe Thirsk YO7 3RG
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## Introduction

This pilot inspection was carried out by one additional inspector. The inspector visited 5 lessons, and held meetings with governors, staff, the school improvement partner and groups of pupils. The inspector observed the school's work and looked at a range of documentation, including policies, the school improvement plan and monitoring and evaluation documents and scrutinised pupils' work and school assessment data. The inspector also analysed 35 questionnaires returned by parents.

The inspector reviewed many aspects of the school's work. He looked in detail at the following:

- how well pupils of all abilities and needs are currently achieving and enjoying their learning, especially for the more able and in writing
- how effectively teaching is meeting pupils' needs and is challenging them to do as well as they can
- the effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage provision
- how well community cohesion is promoted
- the effectiveness of leadership and management in raising expectations, communicating ambition and driving and sustaining improvement.

## Information about the school

Topcliffe is a small voluntary aided village school serving a socially and economically advantaged rural area. Nearly all the pupils are of White British heritage and no pupils have English as an additional language. The number of pupils eligible for a free school meal is extremely low. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is broadly average, although the number with a statement of special educational need is higher than average. The number of pupils arriving or leaving the school at times other than the start or end of the school year is high in some year groups. The school provides for the Early Years Foundation Stage in a Reception class. There is a part-time playgroup on the site run by a private provider. This did not form part of the inspection. A separate report for this provision is available on the Ofsted website. Most children transfer from the playgroup to the Reception class.

The headteacher took up post in January 2009. The school has recently experienced a period of instability in staffing.

## Inspection judgements

Grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory and 4 is inadequate

Overall effectiveness

3

Capacity for sustained improvement

2

## Main findings

This is a satisfactory school. It is improving because there is a sharp focus on raising achievement. The headteacher has a clear vision, quiet determination and high aspirations for the school. The impact of the actions taken to improve provision is starting to show through as pupils' underachievement is being positively tackled. Some aspects of the school's work are good, for example, pupils' personal development and the quality of care, guidance and support they receive. Parents are overwhelmingly supportive and appreciate the happy, friendly atmosphere, especially in the Reception class. However, a few parents did report that they feel their children could achieve more. They are very upbeat about the positive impact of the headteacher.

Pupils enjoy coming to school and their high attendance supports this. All are equally valued and staff enjoy very good relationships with them. Pupils are happy and feel very safe. They have a good grasp of the benefits a healthy diet and regular exercise provide. They are eager to contribute to school life and take on responsibility confidently, for example, making decisions in school council meetings to improve the quality of outdoor play. All pupils, no matter what their needs or background, are sensitively guided and supported so that they can all make a positive contribution.

Children get off to a confident start in the Reception class, settle well and develop independence. More stable staffing is resulting in improvements in the quality and continuity of learning and development. The overall quality of teaching and learning throughout the school is satisfactory. Sometimes learning is good, particularly when teachers match tasks closely to individual pupils' needs and adopt approaches that make learning more active. Often activities, especially for more able and talented pupils, lack challenge and pace and learning slows. Marking provides encouragement and some helpful guidance on the next steps in learning, but the quality is not consistent enough, for example, comments do not always make clear what has been done well and precisely what pupils need to do to improve their work. Assessment information is not always sufficiently well used to accurately inform the planning of future lessons.

Pupils make satisfactory progress from their starting points and reach broadly average standards at the end of Year 6. Achievement through the school is satisfactory. However, while the school enables nearly all pupils to reach average standards, the quality of their writing is a relative weakness and more-able pupils do not always achieve as well as they should in many subjects. The curriculum successfully encourages the development of essential skills, but the range of

experiences is not broad enough. For example, it does not promote a secure understanding of different cultures and beliefs. Recent changes are making the curriculum more interesting and engaging which encourages more complex thinking and independence.

Overall, the effectiveness of leadership and management is satisfactory. Accurate self-evaluation by the headteacher has led to rigorous development planning which is leading to improved achievement for pupils. Hardworking and committed subject leadership is being supported through well targeted professional development and specialist support. Governors provide much commitment and expertise. They probe how well the school is doing, but are not always sufficiently involved in the monitoring, evaluation and strategic planning. They have recognised this and have recently greatly increased their involvement in these issues to bolster the momentum of improvement. As a result, the school has a good capacity to continue to improve and sustain the improvements made.

## What does the school need to do to improve further

- Raise achievement for pupils by:
  - ensuring teachers provide a suitable level of challenge especially for the more able and talented pupils
  - improving the quality of writing.
- Improve the quality of teaching and learning by ensuring that:
  - teachers plan precisely what pupils have to do to improve and inform them of this through marking of their work
  - assessment information is used more effectively to check pupils' progress and to provide an insight into the type of intervention required.
- Improve the range of opportunities made available to develop pupils' understanding of national cultures and beliefs.

A small proportion of 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.

## Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

3
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Pupils are eager to do well, prepared to work hard and listen attentively in lessons especially when activities are interesting and engaging. In lessons where learning is well matched to the pupils' age and needs, demonstrations are clear and questions probing. As a result, pupils concentrate well and progress is good. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those who enter or leave the school at various times during the school year make satisfactory progress because the support they receive is carefully personalised to their needs. In contrast, more able pupils are not always given work which is sufficiently demanding and does not extend their understanding.

Pupils enter school with skills that are broadly typical for their age and make satisfactory progress through the school. Very small numbers and significant variations in cohort sizes for various year groups mean that the results of national tests and assessments vary significantly from year-to-year. The results achieved by Year 6 pupils in 2008 national tests showed that standards were a little above average in mathematics and science and broadly average in English, with standards in writing weaker than those for reading. Current standards, as seen during lessons and pupils' work indicate they are average. Recent concerted efforts to boost pupils' writing skills and more complex thinking for more able pupils has had a positive effect throughout the school. Pupils' achievement is satisfactory overall. It is, however, improving as recent strategies have begun to take effect.

A sense of family, with shared responsibility and consideration, is fostered in school. For example, during the inspection older pupils led an assembly on family celebrations making sure the youngest children had the opportunity to light a candle as a trigger for reflection by all pupils. Pupils' attendance is first class. Spiritual, moral and social development is good and provides a strong focus on mutual respect and successfully supports pupils' personal development. Pupils are well behaved and thoughtful, for example, taking care not to make playgroup children feel uneasy in the dining hall. Pupils are confident to share any worries or concerns with staff who are always on hand and willingly give their time. Bullying is rare and pupils recognise that any inappropriate behaviour is promptly and effectively dealt with by staff. The school enjoys strong links with the village, local parish and businesses which enable pupils to make an effective contribution to their community. For example, they have been involved in carol singing at the nativity service, running stalls at fairs and planting shrubs and bulbs to improve the village environment. There are, however, too few opportunities to develop a secure understanding of cultural issues in nearby cities.

*These are the grades for pupils' outcomes*

Pupils' attainment <sup>1</sup>	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and their progress	3
How well do pupils achieve and enjoy their learning?	3
To what extent do pupils feel safe?	2
How well do pupils behave?	2
To what extent do pupils adopt healthy lifestyles?	2
To what extent do pupils contribute to the school and wider community?	2
Pupils' attendance <sup>1</sup>	1
How well do pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being?	3
What is the extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development?	3

<sup>1</sup>The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

## How effective is the provision?

The quality of teaching is satisfactory. Warm relationships, a calm atmosphere and pro-active support staff are good features of many lessons. Pupils respond positively, particularly when activities are interesting and thought provoking. Assessment information about what pupils know and can do is now collected more regularly, but it is not used consistently to ensure tasks are carefully planned to match the wide range of learning needs in each class. This sometimes results in activities that do not challenge pupils' thinking sufficiently. Pupils do not always have a clear view of how well they are doing and guidance on how they can improve their work is not explained sufficiently well by teachers when they complete their marking.

The curriculum is satisfactory. Changes to enliven learning are adding to pupils' enjoyment and helping boost achievement. For example, the pupils enjoyed designing a catapult suitable for the Roman army and this helped them gain a secure understanding of the mechanics involved. The links that have been forged with groups in Zambia support their good understanding of global diversity. There is a good range of extra-curricular activities that is well attended and appreciated by pupils.

Pupils have a strong sense of belonging in school. Staff know the pupils and their family circumstances well. All pupils, including the more vulnerable are well cared for with staff providing additional time to ensure their personal needs are met. Sensitive pastoral care and support make sure transition from the playgroup into the Reception class and then into secondary school are successful. Staff work effectively with specialist agencies to ensure all needs are met, for example, providing speech therapy intervention and support for those requiring it.

### *These are the grades for the quality of provision*

The quality of teaching	3
The use of assessment to support learning	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	3
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

## How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher and governors are totally committed to ensuring all pupils achieve their potential and develop into thoughtful and considerate citizens. Some recent staffing issues have hindered the progress of some pupils. These issues have been sensitively managed and successful action taken to mitigate the effect on pupils' outcomes. Subject leadership and management has been strengthened by raising expectations, valuing contributions and nurturing staff talents and skills. The headteacher's strong drive to improve is being bolstered by improving approaches to monitoring and evaluation. The current system that checks on pupils' progress is now accurately informing strategic planning, but is not always used well by all teachers when planning lessons. The school is improving its work to ensure all pupils have equal opportunities to succeed and make progress. The school has secure safeguarding systems in place to keep pupils healthy and safe. Overall, community

cohesion is promoted satisfactorily. Despite strong links being forged in the local community and internationally, those required to develop a secure understanding of cultures and beliefs nationally are not as well developed. Very good relationships with parents and carers, including those initially reluctant to engage with school, support well the drive to raise achievement. Partnerships with agencies and other schools to enhance pupils' learning and welfare are good. The school uses its budget efficiently to support provision and provides satisfactory value for money.

*These are the grades for leadership and management*

The effectiveness of leadership and management in communicating ambition and driving improvement	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	3
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	3
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

## Early Years Foundation Stage

The youngest children get off to a positive start in the Reception class because of the satisfactory and improving quality of the Early Years Foundation Stage provision. The children are happy, confident and well cared for and receive lots of adult contact. Children are given a varied range of appropriate, stimulating activities both indoors and outdoors to enjoy and to develop their independence. There is a good balance between self-directed learning and adult led activities. Standards of behaviour are impressive because expectations are clear and routines well structured. Good attention is paid to meeting the individual needs of those who leave and arrive at short notice during the school year. Recent changes ensure that regular observation and assessment of children's progress in all areas of their learning inform planning more consistently.

When children start in the Reception class their skills are broadly typical for their age, although they do vary from year-to-year. Listening and speaking are often strengths, but children's creative skills are usually less well developed. Children make satisfactory progress overall. Some good progress in children's learning is evident but this is not consistent throughout as some children lost continuity in their learning through staff changes. Although evidence of good progress was observed during the inspection, overall progress is satisfactory. Most children reach the nationally expected goals set for them by the end of the Reception Year, although not all of the more-able children achieve as well as their capabilities suggest. The Early Years Foundation Stage leader fosters good teamwork and staff work really hard to improve provision, for example, creating an imaginative outdoor digging area and a quiet corner. Robust checking on children's progress is being established to more effectively guide the planning of activities, extend the challenge of learning and accelerate the rate of progress.



Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
The effectiveness of leadership and management in the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	3

## Views of parents and carers

Parents are extremely positive about the way in which the school cares and educates their children. They praise staff for being approachable and available to share information and concerns they may have. A small number of parents felt their child could be 'stretched more'. The inspection agrees with this view, particularly for the most-able and talented. No concerns or issues were raised about the children's welfare or well-being. A number of positive comments were received about the positive impact of the new headteacher. 'Such a happy school with caring staff and a great new head', echoed the views of most parents.

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Topcliffe Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school. If a parent had more than one child at the school, they were asked to record an answer against all the questions, for each of their children.

The inspector received 35 completed questionnaires. In total, there are 76 parents and carers registered at the school.

	Always	Most of the time	Occasionally	Never
Overall I am happy with my child's experience at this school	28	6	1	0

## What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. In 2007-8, 15% of schools were judged to be outstanding.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well. In 2007-8, 49% of schools were judged good.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils. In 2007-8, 32% of schools were judged satisfactory.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves. In 2007-8, 5% of schools were judged inadequate.

## Common terminology used by inspectors

Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.
Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, training or development. This may refer to the acquisition of skills, knowledge, understanding or desired attributes. Attributes include qualities or personal competencies which are important to the development of the pupil; for example personal, social, cultural, emotional or health.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.

19 June 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Topcliffe Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School, Thirsk, YO7 3RG

Thank you for being so friendly, polite and helpful when I visited your school. I thoroughly enjoyed my time at Topcliffe, particularly the discussions I had with you. I would like to tell you about some of the good things about your school.

- The school staff look after you and care for you well.
- Your behaviour and enjoyment of school life are impressive and this is reflected in your high attendance.
- You know how to stay safe and healthy.
- The school enjoys good relationships with your parents and there are good partnerships with other schools and support agencies.

Your school provides a satisfactory education. By the time you leave school, the standards you reach are in line with the average expected for your age. To help your school get even better and make sure you achieve higher standards, I have asked for some improvements to be made. These will make sure that:

- your work is at the right level for you; challenging but not too easy or too hard
- all of you improve the quality of your writing and the more-able and talented reach even higher standards
- all staff have high expectations for your work, showing you clearly what to do next when they mark your work and use your progress information to plan interesting activities for you
- you develop a secure understanding of cultures and beliefs from across the country.

You can play your part by continuing to work as hard as you can.

Thank you for helping with this inspection. I hope the school will keep on building on its strengths.

Best of luck to you all

Clive Petts  
Lead inspector

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