

Conifers Primary School

Inspection report

Unique reference number	134080
Local authority	Dorset
Inspection number	381604
Inspection dates	27–28 June 2012
Lead inspector	Derek Watts

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 of pupils on the school roll	365
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Angela Matthews
Headteacher	Rachel Hiscock
Date of previous school inspection	2–3 December 2008
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Age group	4–11
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Introduction

Inspection team

Derek Watts	Additional inspector
Simon Francis	Additional inspector
Stephanie Matthews	Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. The inspectors observed teaching and learning in 25 lessons, taught by 14 different teachers. They held discussions with the headteacher, other staff, members of the governing body, pupils and parents and carers. Pupils were heard reading. The inspectors took account of the responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) in planning the inspection. They observed the school's work, and looked at the school's policies, assessment information, pupils' work, teachers' plans and school improvement planning. The inspectors analysed 84 questionnaires completed by parents and carers as well as 113 from pupils and 38 from staff.

Information about the school

Conifers is a much larger than average-sized primary school. The vast majority of the pupils are White British. The overall proportion of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs is average, but the proportion of pupils supported by school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is well above average. The main nature of these needs are speech, language and communication difficulties and moderate learning difficulties. A much higher than average proportion of pupils are known to be eligible for free school meals. The school meets the government's current floor standard, the minimum standards set for attainment and progress.

An on-site children's centre and pre-school are managed by a private organisation and are inspected separately.

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

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness	2
Achievement of pupils	2
Quality of teaching	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	2
Leadership and management	2

Key findings

- Conifers Primary is a good school. Since the previous inspection it has made considerable improvements. Pupils achieve well because of good teaching and an interesting curriculum. The school is not outstanding because of inconsistencies in teaching which prevent achievement being better than good. Furthermore, it has not fully engaged with a very small minority of families in order to improve their children's low attendance.
- Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage make good progress from well below age-expected starting points. Good progress continues through Key Stages 1 and 2. Attainment by the end of Year 6 is broadly average in English and mathematics. Improving pupils' writing has been successful and positive action has been taken to raise achievement in mathematics, which has lagged behind English. Pupils apply literacy, numeracy and technology skills well to their topic work.
- Pupils benefit from good teaching. There are examples of outstanding practice but there is also satisfactory teaching. In the best practice, teachers' high expectations and the challenging tasks set engage and motivate the pupils. Pupils are productive and learn at a rapid pace. Very occasionally, teachers' expectations are not high enough. In a minority of lessons, tasks are not sufficiently challenging and well matched to needs and pupils' learning slows.
- Pupils have positive attitudes to learning and their behaviour is good. Attitudes and behaviour are frequently outstanding in lessons. Attendance is improving but a small number of parents or carers are not able to fully support the school's efforts to raise it to average levels.
- The headteacher provides strong leadership. She is well supported by the deputy headteacher and key leaders in raising achievement. Self-evaluation is thorough and effective action is taken to raise achievement and improve the

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performance of teachers. There have been good improvements to achievement, teaching and to the Early Years Foundation Stage.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of outstanding teaching and eliminate less successful teaching by ensuring that in all classes:
 - expectations of pupils' learning are always high
 - tasks are always challenging and closely matched to pupils' different needs
 - learning and the lesson proceed at a good pace.
- Take steps to strengthen the engagement and the partnership with a small minority of parents whose children have low attendance and help them to improve it.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage and pupils in Key Stage 1 and 2 make good progress. This judgement reflects the views of almost all parents and carers who completed the inspection questionnaire. Pupils told the inspectors, 'We learn new and interesting things.'

Children enter Reception with knowledge, understanding and skills that are well below the levels typically expected for their age. Good teaching and interesting learning activities lead to children's good progress. They develop language, reading and writing skills well. Children apply weighing skills effectively to find out how heavy items are. They develop creativity and imagination successfully through role play and engaging in a range of activities with paints and other materials.

At the time of the previous inspection, attainment was below average by the end of Year 2 and Year 6, and pupils' progress was satisfactory. During the past few years, attainment has improved to average in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of Years 2 and 6. Across the school, most disabled pupils and those with special educational needs make good progress because their needs are carefully assessed and they receive good quality individual or small group support. Pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals make similar progress to others in the school. More-able pupils are usually challenged and extended in lessons. Just occasionally, questioning and tasks are not sufficiently demanding.

Pupils make good progress in speaking and listening because of the well-planned opportunities provided for them to discuss their learning and to express their ideas. The regular and good quality teaching of letters and the sounds they make (phonics)

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ensures that pupils make good progress in reading. Pupils have positive attitudes to reading. The oldest pupils use more advanced reading skills effectively in their independent study and research.

The drive to improve pupils' achievement in writing has been a real success. Pupils write effectively for a range of purposes and they apply their writing skills well to subjects other than English. In Year 4, pupils made good progress in writing non-chronological reports about Dorset and Weymouth. They used interesting adjectives to bring the stunning countryside and scenery to life.

Pupils make good progress in mathematics lessons because tasks are well matched to their abilities and they have good opportunities to investigate and solve problems. Positive action is being taken to narrow the gap in attainment between English and mathematics and to raise the achievement of girls. In the lessons seen, girls and boys performed equally well. In Year 6, pupils made rapid progress in solving area and perimeter problems. They applied numeracy skills well to calculate the cost of fencing the perimeter of different sized fields.

In a high quality information and communication technology lesson in Year 5, pupils made exceptional progress in acquiring and applying skills. They used drawing tools to create an imaginative representation of an alien. Pupils use information and communication technology well to support their learning in a range of subjects.

Quality of teaching

Good quality teaching promotes enjoyment and good learning for most groups of pupils. The findings of the questionnaire showed that almost all parents and carers stated that their children are well taught. Pupils were very positive about their teachers, saying, 'Teachers help us to learn, especially when we are stuck.' Teachers successfully promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. They create a positive climate for learning and foster strong relationships, cooperation and respect for others.

Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage are taught well. They benefit from well-focused adult-led activities. Children also have good opportunities to explore and learn independently. They enjoy the wide range of activities which are linked to themes, for example pirates. Children develop creativity and imagination through role play and activities involving paints and different materials.

Across the school, lessons are well planned and have a clear purpose, and so pupils know what they are expected to learn. Most teachers have high expectations of learning and behaviour. The teaching of basic skills is good. There is an effective and regular programme for the teaching of phonics (letters and the sounds they make). The teaching of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs is effective. In most lessons, teaching assistants provide good support for those who need it. The marking of pupils' work is constructive and helpful. Teachers acknowledge good work and provide constructive comments which help pupils improve.

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Outstanding teaching was seen in a number of English lessons, in information and communication technology in Year 5 and in mathematics in Year 6. In these lessons, teachers' strong subject knowledge and enthusiasm inspired and motivated the pupils. Expectations of learning were extremely high and pupils rose to the challenging questioning and exciting tasks. Pupils were fully engaged, productive and made exceptional gains in their learning. Learning and the lesson moved on at a rapid pace.

Where teaching was satisfactory rather than good, tasks were not always well tailored to pupils' different needs so they were not suitably challenged. Learning and the pace of the lesson were methodical rather than brisk. Very occasionally, the teachers do not expect sufficient work from the pupils.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage feel safe, secure and grow in confidence. Pupils in Key Stages 1 and 2 behave well in lessons and around the school. The school's records of incidents indicate that behaviour is typically good. Pupils have positive attitudes to learning. Outstanding attitudes and behaviour were seen in a number of lessons particularly among the older year groups. Pupils' enthusiasm and their outstanding behaviour contributed very well to the flow of the lessons, and to the rapid pace of learning.

All parents and carers who completed the questionnaire believe that their children feel safe at school and that they are well looked after. Pupils told the inspectors that they are safe, very well looked after and behaviour is often excellent. Most parents and carers believe that the school deals with bullying effectively. Pupils show a good understanding of different forms of bullying, including persistent name-calling and cyber-bullying. Bullying is very rare and pupils are confident that should it occur, the staff would deal with it quickly. A small minority of parents and carers expressed concerns about disruption to learning in lessons. A few pupils exhibit challenging behaviour but they are well managed and supported by staff and so disruption to learning is minimised. Attendance is still below average because a small number of parents or carers are not able to ensure that their children attend regularly, despite the school's clear strategies for monitoring and promoting good attendance.

Leadership and management

The headteacher provides vision and clear educational direction for the school. She, key leaders and staff are firmly focused on raising pupils' achievement and improving teaching and the curriculum. Parents rightly commented, 'The mission is clear and the ethos is fantastic' and 'The school has moved forward so much in the past three years.'

Senior and subject leaders are actively engaged in monitoring and improving their areas of responsibility. Improved assessment procedures and the quality of teaching

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have been key factors to the school's success. Joint class observations between the inspectors and senior leaders confirmed that the school has a very clear overview of teaching. Professional development and training for staff are well linked to the school's improvement priorities. The improvements to pupils' achievement, teaching and to the Early Years Foundation Stage provision from satisfactory to good demonstrate the school's capacity to improve.

Leaders and staff are developing a creative curriculum where pupils are provided with good opportunities to apply a range of skills to their studies. Effective steps have been taken to strengthen provision in writing and mathematics. There are good links between subjects which add enjoyment and meaning to pupils' learning. Equality of opportunity is promoted well and staff strive to ensure that all pupils achieve as well as they can. Leaders ensure that discrimination is dealt with effectively. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted successfully. Pupils are cooperative and show considerable respect for others.

Governance has improved since the previous inspection. Members of the governing body show a good understanding of the school's performance. They are supportive and provide constructive challenge. Good emphasis is given to safeguarding and all requirements are met.

The school engages successfully with the vast majority of parents and carers and the survey shows that most are pleased with the care and education provided for their children.

Glossary

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.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
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.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	54	42	2	2
Primary schools	14	49	32	6
Secondary schools	20	39	34	7
Special schools	33	45	20	3
Pupil referral units	9	55	28	8
All schools	16	47	31	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September to 31 December 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance:	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour:	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Floor standards:	the national minimum expectation of attainment and progression measures.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the governors and headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
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.
Safety:	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



29 June 2012

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Conifers Primary School, Weymouth DT4 0QF

Thank you so much for welcoming us into your school, giving us your views and showing us your work. Conifers is a good school. It has made considerable improvements during the past three years. These are the main strengths.

- You enjoy school and have positive attitudes to learning.
- Children in Reception classes make good progress.
- You make good progress in Key Stages 1 and 2 because of good teaching and interesting topics.
- You get on well with others and behaviour is good in lessons and around the school. It is outstanding in some lessons.
- You feel safe at school because teachers and other adults take very good care of you.
- The school is well led by your headteacher and she is well supported by the deputy headteacher, subject leaders, staff and governors.

We have given your school two key points for improvement.

- We would like to help the school to move towards being outstanding. We have asked the headteacher and governors to increase the amount of outstanding teaching and learning by ensuring that teachers' expectations are always high, that challenging tasks are well suited to your needs and that lessons always move along at a quick pace.
- The school could work more closely and effectively with a few families whose children have low attendance and help them to improve it.

We hope you will all continue to work hard and we wish you every success for the future.

Yours sincerely

Derek Watts
Lead inspector

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