

Conifers School

Egmont Road, Easbourne, Midhurst, West Sussex, GU29 9BG

Inspection dates 26–27 June 2013

Overall effectiveness	Good	2
Pupils' achievement	Good	2
Pupils' behaviour and personal development	Good	2
Quality of teaching	Good	2
Quality of curriculum	Good	2
Pupils' welfare, health and safety	Good	2
Leadership and management	Good	2

Summary of key findings

This school is good because

- Pupils make at least good progress in all subjects, including reading, writing and mathematics. They make good progress in personal development and excellent progress in art.
- Pupils receive personalised learning opportunities because teachers have good understanding of each pupil's needs, abilities and strengths.
- Pupils behave well. They are courteous, kind, and eager to learn. This creates a homely and purposeful atmosphere throughout the school.
- The school is led well by the headteacher. Leaders and staff have shared aims and objectives, and they work collaboratively to achieve these.

It is not yet outstanding because

- Leaders have an accurate overview of the school. They recognise its strengths although systems to address areas for development are not yet strong enough. In addition, the school does not routinely evaluate the impact of any improvements made.
- The monitoring of teaching by leaders is not sufficiently rigorous to improve the quality of lessons over time. The findings of the monitoring are not always conveyed to teachers clearly enough.
- Teaching is not consistently good and pupils do not experience outstanding teaching often enough.
- The marking of pupils' work is variable in quality and not all pupils are confident about what their next steps are. Challenging targets are set, but these are not consistently applied throughout the school.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

- The school meets schedule 1 of The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010, as amended by The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2012 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements.

Information about this inspection

- The inspection was carried out with one day's notice.
- The inspectors observed all year groups and a total of 15 lessons. They observed all teachers available during the inspection.
- Inspectors scrutinised pupils' work and evaluated the content and implementation of the school's policy documents. They met with the headteacher, subject leaders, the chair of governors and groups of pupils.
- Inspectors took account the views of pupils, parents and staff through discussion and surveys. They examined 31 responses expressed on Ofsted's on-line 'Parent View', eight staff questionnaires, and information gathered through the school's own questionnaires.

Inspection team

Susan Mann HMI, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Susan Gadd

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Conifers School is a coeducational, non-denominational school for boys and girls. It is registered for 120 pupils aged from three to 11 years. It opened in 1954 and is located in Midhurst in West Sussex.
- There are currently 95 pupils on roll aged from three to 11 years. 36 pupils attend part-time. There are no pupils with a statement of special educational needs.
- There is a governing body but this does not perform the role of proprietor and has a solely supportive role.
- The school provides before- and after-school care facilities for pupils. It also provides extended activities for the locality through its free Saturday morning clubs and a weekly parent and toddler group.
- There is a nursery which shares the same site as the school and makes provision for children aged under three years. This is the Conifers Early Year Department. It was not inspected on this occasion.
- The school does not make use of additional facilities elsewhere.
- The school was last inspected in February 2010.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching so that more is outstanding, by:
 - ensuring the marking of pupils' work provides them with clear indication of what they must do to improve
 - setting challenging targets for all pupils in each form, so that pupils know exactly what they must do to progress
 - making improvements to the existing systems used to monitor the quality of teaching and learning by providing more systematic feedback to teachers.
- Sharpen development planning by setting specific measurable criteria.
- Develop systems to ensure all improvements are regularly evaluated.

Inspection judgements

Pupils' achievement

Good

Pupils' achievement is good because of good teaching. Pupils are motivated and eager to learn. Pupils say they enjoy being challenged by difficult work and almost all parents believe their child makes good progress. When they start, children's skills and abilities vary but are in line with age-related expectations. They make good progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage in all areas of learning.

In the Juniors (Key Stage 1), almost all pupils continue to make consistently good progress in their reading, spelling, English and mathematics. Some make even better progress in some aspects of their learning. In the Seniors (Key Stage 2), specialist teaching in English, mathematics and science enables pupils to do well so that by Year 6, their level of knowledge, understanding and skills exceed levels found nationally.

Lessons are tailored to pupils' individual needs which leads to success. This personalised approach suits pupils with special educational needs very well, and results in them also making good progress. Similarly, pupils in receipt of the school's bursary fund make equally good progress as their peers because of this individualised approach. The quality of work found in pupils' books is good, with examples of exceptional work. The quality of writing is very good throughout the school. Pupils are enthused by topics which thread through almost all of their lessons, such as the recent theme of 'old and new', and their written work reflects their high levels of interest. Pupils' progress in mathematics and science is good because teachers present good subject knowledge and give clear explanation of concepts and techniques.

The school prides itself on ensuring pupils achieve in a broad range of subjects and skills. As a result, pupils do well in many other subjects besides literacy and mathematics. Many pupils of all ages excel in art as a result of inspirational and outstanding specialist teaching. Excellent pieces of pupil artwork adorn the school walls and windowsills. Much of this is inspired by topic work, such as the 'mood boards' done as part of the 'Africa' topic, and the sketches and paintings done of the Midhurst ruins. A large number of pupils are successful in achieving success in graded music examinations as a result of school and peripatetic teaching. Many pupils exhibit very good reasoning skills, resulting in 'thinking pupils', able to hold intelligent and mature discussion about topics, such as juniors discussing the rainforest and the impact of climate change.

Pupils' behaviour and personal development

Good

Pupils' behaviour and personal development are good. Pupils say there is no bullying at Conifers, and responses from parents and staff support this view. Pupils are calm and orderly in school. During playtimes, pupils of all ages play cooperatively with one another and relationships are evidently good. There are very few occasions in lessons when pupils need to be reminded to behave well, but usually pupils are diligent and attentive in lessons. Attendance and punctuality are good. The personal development of pupils is also good. Pupils show a strong sense of moral responsibility and are kind and encouraging to one another. Staff show respect and fondness for pupils, and rapport between adults and pupils is good. This produces a harmonious and happy environment, with friendly chatter evident at break times, and during before and after school care.

Provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good, and permeates the curriculum. Assemblies and class discussions give good opportunities for pupils to reflect on events, both past and present. Pupils learn about different religions through class work and events linked to people they know. Consequently, they develop tolerance and understanding to respect those of different beliefs from their own. Pupils rise well to the 'family' ethos of the school and have a clear sense of right and wrong. The school makes a strong contribution to its local community, with its

bursary fund for local families, an occasional 'Saturday Club' where local families can enjoy the school's provision for sports, arts, and other aspects free of charge, and a weekly group for parents and babies. Lessons and events provide opportunities for all pupils to learn about their local and wider communities. Projects about Africa and sponsorship of a Kenyan child help broaden pupils' understanding of life in other countries. Their understanding of how people from different cultural backgrounds live in harmony within Britain is developing well. The school ensures that issues are presented to pupils in a well-informed and balanced manner.

Quality of teaching

Good

The quality of teaching is good for all ages of pupils so most make good progress in lessons and during their time at school. The small class sizes, combined with accurate assessment of achievement, allow pupils to progress at their own rate. Pupils with special educational needs and those with disabilities receive similarly tailored provision leading to effective teaching, so that all make good progress from their starting points. Teachers have high expectations, and in most lessons they deliver interesting lessons that hold pupils' attention well. Pupils take great pride in the presentation of their work.

Ongoing classroom assessment, frequent pupil-teacher discussions, and regular testing provide a good overview so teachers know how well each pupil is doing. For pupils in the Early Years Foundation Stage, detailed learning journals chart progress and are used to plan and deliver activities to suit learning needs well. Teachers of these young pupils are skilled at delivering challenging learning opportunities in a relaxed and encouraging manner, which helps pupils fulfil their potential. Teachers' assessment of how well pupils understand what is being taught is good overall, and pupils follow the lessons well. However, in a small number of lessons, teachers miss early signs that pupils are not following, and this slows the pace of learning.

Use of specialist teachers enhances learning significantly, because teachers bring their expertise and passion for their subject to the classroom. In art, for example, the teaching constantly probes and extends pupils' thinking and ideas exceptionally well, resulting in impressive experimental fabrics, produced as part of the school's 'Creative Costumes' event. Pupils are eager to do well. However, not all pupils have enough opportunity to identify their own next steps in learning, and, in a few instances, targets are not routinely used to good effect in every class. This limits further progress and stops some pupils from taking full ownership of their learning.

Pupils' work is marked frequently. Detailed verbal feedback is usually given to pupils on what is good and what might be improved. In some subjects and classes, marking gives helpful feedback to pupils, but this is not the case throughout the school. A few pupils do not consistently receive written comments which highlight their progress and clarify what is needed for further improvement.

Quality of curriculum

Good

The curriculum is good. The wide range of subjects covers the required areas of learning and allows pupils to achieve well in many aspects, including their mathematics and literacy work. A suitable mix of school and published schemes provide a framework for the curriculum that is flexible and supports learning and progress well. Planning documents demonstrate clearly defined progression for pupils to follow, and these are supported by detailed curriculum policies. Teachers in the Early Years Foundation Stage deliver an interesting programme of activities that present a good balance between child-initiated and adult-led learning delivered both inside and outdoors. Strong cross-curricular links enliven lessons so the overwhelming majority of pupils enjoy school and say they thoroughly enjoy their learning. For example, a visit to Arundel yielded work in history, writing, and model making. As part of work on 'The Jungle Book', pupils baked and decorated cupcakes, designed and made posters, and performed their own play. Visitors, events, outings and school

performances provide additional experiences that build on pupils' topics and classroom learning, and add excitement to school life.

There are lots of opportunities for pupils to develop their personal, social, emotional and healthy well-being. Frequent use of the school's large field and sports area promotes good physical health, as well as lessons delivered by the school's specialist physical education teacher. The broad range of subjects covered in classes is enhanced by many extra-curricular activities that are well attended. These include opportunities in sports and expressive arts, as well as in gardening (the Green Wellies Club) and the school's Problem Solving Club. The school provides a homely and welcoming environment that pupils and their parents greatly appreciate.

Pupils' welfare, health and safety

Good

Good provision is made for pupils' welfare, health and safety throughout the school and all regulations for independent schools are met. Pupils report they feel safe at school, and the overwhelming majority of parents and staff agree with this view. Pupils are helpful and supportive of one another, and this leads to a relaxed atmosphere where pupils appear content. Staff give the impression that nothing is too much trouble, and their patience encourages pupils to readily seek help when needed. Pupils demonstrate a good understanding of how to stay safe, and older pupils learn the importance of e-safety when using the internet. Regular checks are made of how premises are used, and action is taken to keep these safe. Outings are thoroughly risk assessed.

All staff are trained in child protection; the designated officer for safeguarding has received the required advanced level of this training. Procedures to recruit staff follow safe recruitment procedures. Appropriate checks are made and these are recorded on the single central register as required by regulations. The school has a policy to deal with bullying, although there is no evidence of bullying at the school. A wide range of good quality policies underpin the school's provision of welfare and safety, including behaviour management and health and safety. Required fire precautions have been taken, with expert advice taken and acted upon. All electrical appliances are regularly checked by those qualified to do so. The majority of staff are trained in paediatric first aid so help is at hand in the event of injury or illness.

Leadership and management

Good

The leadership and management of Conifers School are good. The headteacher leads the school well, and puts priority on the overall well-being of pupils and the value of an 'all-round' education. The governing body has a defined role of support and challenge within the school. Its members bring a useful range of professional expertise to the school, together with strong commitment to sustaining the school and its aims.

Teaching is managed well. Systems to monitor pupil progress are in place to track achievement and these identify what is working well and what is not. The headteacher and staff make good use of classroom assessment, testing, and termly reports to measure progress and assess pupils' needs. Regular monitoring of lessons is done on an informal basis, and this provides the headteacher with an accurate picture of teaching. However, this does not always result in systematic feedback to teachers about potential improvements, which limits the further improvement of teaching within the school.

The headteacher makes accurate evaluation of the school. She has used this information to implement the required improvements successfully, such as improving systems used to track pupil achievement. However, the system of development planning is informal, with much reliant on effective verbal discussion. This makes it more difficult to measure the success and impact of changes planned and implemented.

The accommodation is good and meets regulations. The procedure for handling complaints also

meets requirements. Parents and carers receive all the required information about the school. Information is provided in a number of ways so that most parents feel well informed. The school website is informative and the 'Conifers Crier' newsletter provides weekly updates.

Parents and carers play a large part in school life, and are often invited to attend plays, concerts and assemblies. A large number attended the annual sports day. The Parents' Committee provides useful channels of communication with staff and also welcomes new parents to the school. One parent summed up the enthusiasm evidently held by many at the school, describing Conifers as 'a jewel of a school'.

The proprietor has ensured that all regulations for independent schools are met.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	A school which provides an exceptional quality of education and significantly exceeds minimum requirements.
Grade 2	Good	A school which provides a high quality of education that exceeds minimum requirements.
Grade 3	Adequate	A school which meets minimum requirements but needs to improve the quality of education it provides.
Grade 4	Inadequate	A school where minimum requirements are not met and/or the quality of education has serious weaknesses.

School details

Unique reference number	126118
Inspection number	420187
DfE registration number	938/6072

This inspection was carried out under section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

Type of school	Preparatory school
School status	Independent school
Age range of pupils	3–11 years
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	95
Number of part time pupils	36
Proprietor	Conifers School
Chair	Mark Drysdale
Headteacher	Jennie Peel
Date of previous school inspection	3–4 February 2010
Annual fees (day pupils)	£6,180–£8,610
Telephone number	01730 813243
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