

Conifers Primary School

Radipole Lane, Weymouth, Dorset DT4 0QF

Inspection dates

12–13 February 2019

Overall effectiveness	Requires improvement
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Requires improvement
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Requires improvement
Outcomes for pupils	Requires improvement
Early years provision	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Teachers do not consistently use assessment information to plan learning which is well matched to pupils' starting points. Therefore, the most able pupils are not consistently challenged.
- Pupils do not get off to a good start in learning to read in key stage 1. The quality of teaching of phonics is not consistently good.
- Disadvantaged pupils, boys and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) do not make sufficient progress in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Pupils are not provided with sufficient opportunities to apply their writing skills across the curriculum.
- Attendance is below the national average and too many pupils are regularly absent.
- Until recently, teachers did not ensure that pupils use their understanding of calculation skills to enable them to solve mathematical problems and explain their thinking.
- Middle leaders carry out checks on teaching and learning. However, they have not received the training they need to ensure that they have maximum impact on improving teaching. As a result, teaching is not consistently good.
- School leaders and governors do not evaluate the use of additional funding provided for disadvantaged pupils precisely enough.
- Governors are not rigorously challenging school leaders to ensure that they swiftly improve the quality of teaching and learning and pupils' outcomes, particularly for disadvantaged pupils.

The school has the following strengths

- Pupils are very well cared for and are proud of their school. They feel safe. Leaders have ensured that pupils' social and cultural experiences are positive.
- Safeguarding procedures are robust. Leaders are vigilant and work well with outside agencies to keep pupils safe from harm.
- Provision for children in the early years is a strength of the school. Teachers know the children well and plan activities that ensure that all children make the progress they are capable of.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve leadership and management by ensuring that:
 - leaders effectively evaluate the quality of teaching and learning and use their findings to ensure that teaching is consistently strong across the school
 - the wider leadership team further develops its skills in supporting improvements in teaching
 - governors hold leaders stringently to account for the quality of teaching and learning and outcomes for pupils, especially for disadvantaged pupils
 - attendance is improved to at least the national average and the level of persistent absence is reduced.
- Improve the quality of teaching and learning across the school by:
 - ensuring that teachers use assessment information effectively to plan learning which builds on what pupils know, understand and can do, particularly for the most able pupils
 - ensuring that mathematics teaching develops pupils' application of skills to help them solve problems and to develop their reasoning and thinking skills
 - further developing pupils' writing skills across the curriculum.
- Improve outcomes for pupils by:
 - ensuring that boys, disadvantaged pupils and pupils with SEND make consistently strong progress from their starting points, particularly in phonics and writing
 - ensuring that the most able pupils attain as well as the most able pupils nationally.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Leaders have an overgenerous view of the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Their monitoring does not sufficiently focus on the impact of teaching on pupils' achievement, especially for the most able pupils.
- Leaders' plans for improvements are becoming more refined and demonstrate a greater understanding of what is required to improve pupils' outcomes. However, leaders' evaluations of these plans are not yet sharp enough to enable them to identify whether their actions are ensuring improvements in pupils' learning. As a result, pupils' progress is not yet good enough.
- Middle leaders are aware of the school's priorities for improvement and the need to raise standards. However, many of these leaders are still developing their leadership skills. Their use of assessment information is not yet strong enough to allow them to plan the precise support that some teachers require.
- Leaders track pupils' progress at regular points in the year. This work is providing them with a more accurate understanding of the progress pupils make. Teachers confirm the accuracy of their assessments with other schools so that there is more confidence in the rigour of this information. However, leaders have not yet fully embedded the use of this information in classroom practice. This means that, sometimes, teachers do not plan precisely enough to challenge and support pupils effectively. This prevents pupils making the progress they should.
- In the past, disadvantaged pupils and pupils with SEND did not make the progress they could. After commissioning an external review of pupil premium funding, leaders have identified the barriers to learning for this group of pupils and now track their progress regularly, implementing strategies and reviewing the impact of actions taken. However, the actions taken to provide support for these pupils are not yet fully embedded into everyday classroom practice. Consequently, some pupils are not catching up to their peers and other pupils nationally.
- Leaders evaluate the impact of the sport premium to ensure that it is used effectively to engage pupils in physical activities. The number of extra-curricular activities has grown and pupils enjoy attending these. Sports coaching has a positive impact on pupils' attitudes to physical education and provides effective professional development for teachers.
- Leaders are successful in developing the personal development of pupils. They put an emphasis on respect for others and on pupils' social and emotional well-being. As a result, this is a strength of the school.
- Leaders have improved the content of the curriculum. Where this is most effective, it enthuses pupils and they enjoy their learning. This was particularly evident in the topic work for Years 5 and 6 on the Second World War, and in Year 6 artwork skills based on the works of Picasso. However, this level of enthusiasm and engagement is not consistent across the school and its curriculum. Some subjects are not taught in sufficient depth to provide pupils with secure knowledge, for example science, geography and religious education.

- The curriculum for spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is effective in promoting pupils' understanding of the need for tolerance, respect and caring for others. Pupils are provided with opportunities to explore wider cultural issues such as the plight of some children in Africa. Pupils are proud of their commitment to helping others.
- Leaders are committed to providing activities that broaden pupils' horizons and improve their life chances. They ensure that all pupils have access to the clubs and visits that are organised throughout the year.
- Most parents and carers who spoke to an inspector or who responded to the online Parent View questionnaire are happy with the quality of education and care that their children receive. They describe how their children are safe, well cared for and looked after by staff. For example, they are positive about how well the school cares for and nurtures the pupils. However, some parents raised concerns about the length of time it takes to ensure that their children with additional needs receive the support they require.

Governance of the school

- Governors are committed to the school and to improving the opportunities for pupils. They make regular visits to the school and meet with school leaders to discuss improvement plans and progress made against the actions. However, there is a lack of evaluation of these plans as to whether they are having a positive impact on pupils' outcomes. Consequently, governors are not challenging school leaders rigorously enough or holding them to account fully for their actions.
- Governors are not checking the use of additional funding for disadvantaged pupils and pupils with SEND. Leaders' plans have changed recently due to local authority audits, which highlighted the actions needed to improve outcomes. Governors have not checked the implementation of these plans sufficiently to ensure that these pupils are making rapid progress or catching up with their peers.
- Governors have a clear understanding of their role in ensuring the safeguarding of pupils. The chair of governors checks the procedures and practices regularly, as well as the health and safety regulations.
- Governors have recently undertaken a review of their work. They have identified areas for their own development and have plans in place to improve their practice further. They know that they need to question school leaders with more precision to evaluate the impact of strategies to inform future spending decisions.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders and governors have further developed the already strong culture of safeguarding within the school. Leaders are vigilant in ensuring pupils' safety. Leaders quickly identify and respond to concerns when pupils may be at risk from harm. Referrals are timely and outline a chronology of action and outcomes clearly. Leaders track the support pupils receive from outside agencies effectively.

- Leaders have appointed staff who provide early help for vulnerable pupils and their families. They are proactive in working with pupils and families to engage them in gaining the support required to build confidence and self-esteem.
- Leaders are diligent in ensuring that staff training in safeguarding is up to date. Staff are secure in their knowledge of the procedures in school and familiar with guidance in areas such as child protection, radicalisation and extremism.
- Parents and pupils say that the school is a safe and happy place. Pupils know how to stay safe, both in and out of school and online. They know who they can report any concerns to should they arise.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- Teaching is not consistently good enough across the school to secure good progress for pupils, particularly in writing and mathematics. Leaders' evaluation of the quality of teaching and learning is not precise enough to ensure that teachers are provided with sufficiently targeted professional development to ensure that the quality of teaching improves swiftly.
- Teachers do not use assessment information consistently to plan sequential activities that build on pupils' prior knowledge and understanding. This is particularly the case in the teaching of writing and mathematics. This means that not enough pupils reach the standards of which they are capable, particularly boys and those who are most able.
- The school now provides supportive catch-up sessions for those pupils who are falling behind, including those with SEND and disadvantaged pupils. However, class teachers are not ensuring that the skills pupils learn within these out-of-class sessions are implemented in their everyday classwork. Consequently, these sessions are not having the impact they should to ensure that pupils make the progress required.
- Some pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs receive an individualised curriculum. These pupils are making stronger progress than others with SEND. However, when they work alongside their peers, their needs are not always as well catered for. This is because teachers do not consistently plan appropriate activities to meet these needs.
- Teachers ensure that pupils develop a good understanding of calculation in their mathematics lessons. Teachers are increasingly providing tasks that will assist pupils to use calculation skills to help them solve problems and develop reasoning skills. However, they do not consistently ensure that pupils are challenged by tasks that require them to use their understanding, especially those who are most able. This limits pupils' progress in this subject.
- Pupils' writing books demonstrate that their progress remains inconsistent. Pupils are beginning to develop their vocabulary and grammar. However, the quality of pupils' handwriting in books is inconsistent and is hampering some pupils' progress.
- Pupils' application of their writing skills in subjects other than English is weak. Teachers are not providing a range of opportunities to enable pupils to apply their knowledge and understanding of aspects such as sentence construction.

- Teachers do not consistently ensure that pupils act on information about how they can improve their work. As a result, some pupils have not developed sufficient skills to edit and further improve their work.
- Teaching of phonics is too inconsistent. Where teachers provide pupils with opportunities to apply their phonics knowledge in reading and writing, pupils are successful. At times, however, teaching is not sufficiently targeted at groups of pupils' needs and their next steps. Consequently, pupils do not make the progress needed to ensure that they meet the national expectations. Pupils who are less-confident readers lack the skills of sounding out words and blending the sounds to ensure fluency of reading.
- Where teaching is more effective, teachers have a secure understanding of pupils' needs and have good subject knowledge. Consequently, they ensure that pupils' needs are catered for. Teaching assistants in these year groups are well deployed to support learning. They work collaboratively with the class teachers to deepen pupils' understanding through questioning and timely interventions to address misconceptions.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Requires improvement

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils are proud of their school. They speak highly of the care, guidance and support they receive from members of staff. A variety of different programmes provide valuable additional support. Such approaches have been successful in improving pupils' emotional and social understanding, as well as raising their self-esteem.
- Pupils demonstrate respect for each other in the playground and in lessons. Positive relationships between pupils and adults are a strong feature of the school. Pupils speak to each respectfully. They have developed strong team ethics and collaboration skills when working as groups, both within the classroom and outside.
- Attitudes to learning are positive and improving further. Where teaching meets their needs, pupils are attentive, work hard and settle well to their learning for the majority of the time. However, where teaching is weaker, a minority of pupils lose concentration.
- Pupils report that they highly value the school's approach to the implementation of a 'Rights Respecting School'. One pupil expressed the views of many, saying, 'Everyone in school has a voice and that is important.'
- Pupils feel safe and secure in school. Pupils of all ages have a good understanding of the potential risks when using the internet and use it safely and with confidence. For example, they know the importance of protecting their personal information and how to keep themselves safe. They are clear that they must tell an adult if something makes them feel uncomfortable. They have a strong awareness of 'stranger danger'.
- Pupils have a good understanding of the importance of a healthy lifestyle. They have been taught about healthy diets and exercise and the importance of these for their growth and development.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement.
- Absence and persistent absence rates remain well above the national averages. This is partly due to the high mobility of pupils entering the school. However, leaders' actions to stem the high absence rates have not been swift enough to have a significant impact.
- Leaders track incidents of poor behaviour well and take swift action to involve parents if necessary. Incidents of poor behaviour have reduced in the past year. Pupils are very aware of leaders' higher expectations.
- The school's strategies to improve the engagement of pupils who exhibit challenging behaviour have been successful over the past year. Pupils with challenging behaviour are dealt with swiftly and calmly to ensure a positive outcome. This has reduced pupil exclusions this year. These pupils have benefited from teachers' consistent implementation of behavioural expectations.
- Pupils play energetically and harmoniously in the playground. They feel safe and say that other pupils are kind. School leaders have worked with pupils on their understanding of bullying. The school's records for bullying are clear and show decisive action taken to ensure that there is a not a reoccurrence of incidents.
- The general behaviour of pupils is positive. The school is calm and orderly. Pupils move around sensibly, following the guidance of their teachers. The vast majority of parents and pupils support the school's values and ethos.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- The proportion of pupils achieving the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of Year 6 in 2018 remains below the national average. A smaller proportion of pupils than in other schools achieved the higher standard in 2018.
- The proportion of pupils achieving the expected standards at the end of key stage 1 is rising slowly. The proportion of pupils who achieve higher standards is also increasing.
- Boys' achievements are lower than those of boys in other schools in core subjects.
- The progress of current pupils, especially those who are disadvantaged and those with SEND, is not consistently good. Pupils are not making strong enough progress to enable them to catch up and to be working at their age-related expectations in writing and mathematics. This is because teachers are not consistently planning activities that ensure that pupils can build on their skills and knowledge within the classroom.
- Current standards in writing and mathematics, particularly for the most able pupils, are too low. Teaching does not enable them to write at length or with accuracy across the curriculum. The school does not track the most able pupils effectively enough to ensure that teaching enables them to achieve their full potential.
- Progress is stronger in Year 5 and Year 6, where teachers are ensuring that pupils' learning is matched more closely to their next steps of learning. However, these pupils still need to make better progress before they achieve as well as other pupils nationally.

- Despite the increase in the proportion of pupils who reach the expected threshold in phonics at the end of Year 1, outcomes remain below the national level. The proportion of pupils who successfully retake the phonics screening check at the end of Year 2 is also below the national average. Current pupils in Year 1 and Year 2 are not progressing well enough to enable them to achieve the nationally expected standard.

Early years provision

Good

- Provision for children in the early years is strong. Leaders are reflective of their teaching and the needs of the children. They plan learning that builds on what the children can already do, know and understand.
- Leaders' self-evaluation is accurate and identifies the strengths of the provision, as well as the areas for development. All adults working within the Reception classes have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities. They ensure that children are provided with the best possible opportunities and activities to enable them to make the progress they are capable of. Activities and tasks are adapted and modified as a result of clear assessments of children's needs.
- Most children enter Reception with skills and knowledge that are typically below those expected according to their age. These children make good progress. However, over time, a large proportion of them do not achieve a good level of development.
- Current children in Reception entered the school with knowledge and skills which are typical for their age. These children are making strong progress and are on track to achieve standards similar to those expected nationally.
- Teaching and learning for language and communication, early reading and writing, as well as mathematics, ensure that children make strong progress in these areas. Children are beginning to write using their developing phonics knowledge and letter formation. Children learn the value of numbers. They are beginning to use simple calculation skills to add and subtract numbers. All groups of children, including those who are disadvantaged, those with SEND and the most able, are making good progress from their starting points.
- Leaders have identified that children's personal, social and emotional development are weaker areas of learning. They have put programmes into place to ensure that these areas improve. These programmes are having a positive impact. Children are becoming more resilient and respectful, and interact with each other and adults with increasing success.
- Relationships between adults and children are positive. Adults know the children very well and cater for their needs. Children are well behaved and respond appropriately to each other. They are developing their collaboration skills and work well in groups with adults, as well as independently. Adults have high expectations of the children.
- Parents are very positive about their children's experiences within the early years classes. They value the transition activities into Year 1 that prepare their children for the next stage of their education. They are invited into class on a regular basis and develop good relationships with the adults working in the class. This ensures good communication and quickly addresses any concerns.

- Leaders are aware that they need to enhance the outdoor learning provision to ensure that children benefit from a wider range of learning experiences. Plans are in place to achieve this. However, these plans have not yet been actioned.

School details

Unique reference number	134080
Local authority	Dorset
Inspection number	10086878

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 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	412
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Dorothy Wood
Headteacher	Andrew Johnson
Telephone number	01305 771 289
Website	www.conifers.dorset.sch.uk/
Email address	office@conifers.dorset.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	2–3 July 2015

Information about this school

- Conifers Primary School is larger than the average-sized primary school. It serves the community surrounding the school.
- The majority of pupils attending the school are of White British heritage.
- The proportion of pupils who are in receipt of pupil premium funding is above the national average.
- The proportion of pupils with SEND is above the national average. The proportion of those pupils who have an education, health and care plan is in line with the national average.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed pupils' learning across the school. Most observations were undertaken jointly with the senior leaders.
- The inspectors looked at pupils' current work across the curriculum and carried out learning walks across the school.
- The inspectors listened to pupils read in Years 1, 2, 5 and 6 and spoke with them to find out about their attitudes to reading.
- Meetings were held with governors, middle leaders and pupils. The lead inspector had a telephone conversation with the support partner from the local authority.
- The inspectors took account of 71 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, and held informal discussions with parents when they brought their children to school. Inspectors took account of 31 responses to the staff questionnaire. The inspectors took account of 18 pupil responses to the online questionnaire and talked with pupils at break and lunchtime, as well as during lessons.
- The inspectors looked at a wide range of school documents, including the school's self-evaluation, the school improvement plan, school policies, minutes of governors' meetings and the school's own assessment systems and monitoring records.
- The inspectors reviewed a wide range of safeguarding evidence, including the school's single central record and incident logs.

Inspection team

Paul Smith, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Katherine Powell	Ofsted Inspector
Alison Cogher	Ofsted Inspector

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