



Conifers Primary School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 134080
LEA Dorset
Inspection number 282450
Inspection dates 8 February 2006 to 9 February 2006
Reporting inspector Michael Burghart AI

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Radipole Lane
School category	Community		Weymouth
Age range of pupils	4 to 11		Dorset DT4 0QF
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01305 771289
Number on roll	409	Fax number	01305 782 762
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mr Peter Rendall
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable	Headteacher	Mrs Rachel Hiscock

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is a large primary school formed in 2004 in an amalgamation of an infant and a junior school. It is currently housed in the old junior building whilst new accommodation is being constructed on the site ready for Easter 2006. Most staff came from the two previous schools. Many of the staff are new to their roles of responsibility. The school serves an area with an above-average profile of social deprivation. Virtually all pupils are from White British backgrounds. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities is well above average. The attainment of children when they first join the school is below average and, for a significant minority, well below.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Conifers Primary provides a satisfactory standard of education and gives sound value for money. The future looks bright. The school is building on the strengths of the previous infant and junior schools. Staff morale is high and the almost completed new building is eagerly awaited. Past weaknesses, such as higher-attaining pupils' achievement and older pupils' behaviour, are being overcome.

Although tracking of pupils' performance and the further development of the curriculum still need attention, better planning, teaching and monitoring of how effectively the school is managed are having positive effects on learning. Standards in English at the end of Year 6 have been raised from below to above average, with pupils achieving well. Standards are improving in mathematics and science but, because of problems in the past, are still below average. Pupils are making progress in catching up this year.

Provision for Reception is good and children make good progress from below-average starting points. Standards are satisfactory at the end of Year 2 and lay a solid foundation for future work. Throughout the school, progress seen in most lessons is good but this is negatively affected by below-average attendance rates. Overall progress is satisfactory.

The school takes good care of pupils, who now respond well with good behaviour. It is particularly well led by the headteacher, who has successfully formed staff from the two schools into a cohesive team. With still more to do to develop the roles of curriculum coordinators, the overall quality of leadership and management is satisfactory. However, the headteacher's and senior leadership team's evaluation of the school's development is very good. Priorities closely match those raised by inspectors, showing the school has a good capacity to improve.

What the school should do to improve further

- Further develop how teachers and curriculum coordinators assess and track pupils' performance to identify how to make improvements.
- Raise standards in mathematics and science, making sure higher-attaining pupils are sufficiently challenged, and allocate more time to both subjects to provide for more investigative work.
- Improve attendance rates.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Although standards are below average in some aspects of mathematics and science, overall, pupils' achievements and standards are satisfactory.

In English, standards have been improved to above average and pupils achieve well, and in some cases very well, as a result of the school's push to develop literacy skills. Standards are below average in mathematics and science when pupils leave the school. This is the result of underachievement in the past, particularly of higher attainers. This

underachievement has left gaps in pupils' knowledge and understanding and provided too little experience of investigative work. However, recent improvements to teaching are helping pupils to catch up, to the extent that pupils' achievement in mathematics and science is now satisfactory.

The newness of the school makes it difficult to judge what the overall progress will be from Reception to Year 6. However, inspectors find that progress in most lessons is good and that new initiatives are working. Progress against the school's challenging targets is satisfactory, with higher attainers now achieving almost as well as they should. Those with learning difficulties make at least the same progress as other pupils.

Children make good progress in Reception from below-average starting points and most begin Year 1 having achieved what is expected at this age. Pupils make satisfactory progress by the end of Year 2 and standards are about average.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' personal development and well-being are good. Pupils enjoy school. Their attitudes are positive. Behaviour, which in the school's view, sometimes was not good enough in the past, is now good. It is very well managed. Pupils who could present problems are effectively supported and counselled, for example, in the popular 'Lunch Club'.

Attendance is unsatisfactory. Despite the school's efforts, one in four pupils show poor attendance, which often negatively affects their progress.

Pupils have a clear picture of what a healthy lifestyle means. This is supported well in science lessons and in personal, social and health education. Pupils can see the point of sporting activities and are keen to join in.

Pupils feel safe in school. They appreciate the need for rules. Discussions in circle time activities result in good social and moral development. Pupils' spiritual and cultural development is satisfactory. Preparation for everyday life is satisfactory.

Pupils are aware of community and world issues such as waste and pollution and appreciate the differences between their own lives and those of children elsewhere such as in the Gambia.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching and learning are satisfactory. They are good in Reception, where children make good progress, and in English throughout the school, where standards have been raised by successfully pitching work at different ability levels. Past weaknesses in mathematics and science lessons are being overcome. This is the result of better planning, improved monitoring of the quality of teaching, and a good programme of

support for staff from senior leaders and officers of the local authority. Apart from in English, where procedures are good, not enough is done to identify what pupils need to do next to improve their work.

Teaching and support for the high proportion of pupils with learning difficulties are good. Teaching assistants make a strong contribution to learning. In an outstanding Year 1 numeracy lesson, less able pupils made good progress in doubling numbers because of very good questioning from the teacher and assistants.

There is a conscious effort to make work enjoyable. In the best lessons, activities really grab pupils' attention. In the least successful sessions the pace is too slow, work is less exciting, and pupils are too passive. In the past this has led to behaviour problems but, to the school's credit, teachers manage behaviour well, even when work is not riveting.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum is satisfactory, with strengths in Reception and in provision for those with learning difficulties. There has been a well-founded intentional bias towards English, with a generous amount of time spent on the subject in class. The subject has also benefited from effective support programmes. Other subjects, most notably mathematics, science and information and communication technology, have not received the same degree of focus since the school opened. With standards below average and gaps in pupils' knowledge and understanding, there is a need to redress this balance.

Pupils are keen to participate in a good range of out-of-school activities. A good programme of visits and visitors successfully broadens the curriculum. Healthy lifestyles are well promoted through healthy eating and two hours of physical education each week. Accommodation and resources are currently adequate. The impressive new building promises much.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Overall, care and guidance for pupils are satisfactory. Pastoral and physical care is good. The school actively seeks to protect pupils both inside and outside the building. So far, this has been done very well during construction work. All child protection and health and safety procedures are effective and well understood by staff. Pupils feel safe from bullying and seek out friendly staff to confide in or seek reassurance. "There's always someone to turn to," reported a Year 6 girl. Pupils with challenging problems and learning difficulties are well supported. Effective links with parents, carers and support agencies ensure that pupils have a safe place in which to learn, play and grow. The school already knows that systems to encourage good attendance are not effective enough.

The school has tried hard this year to overcome weaknesses in how pupils' progress is assessed. This really works in English, where assessment has highlighted how pupils

can improve by measuring success against their targets. Pupils are well aware of these. In other subjects, especially mathematics and science, there is still a lot to do to raise standards through accurately assessing and carefully tracking pupils' performance.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leadership and management is satisfactory overall. However, there are clear strengths in the work of senior leaders and how they are raising standards by improving the quality of provision. There are some areas for development in how the curriculum is managed. The head has very effectively led and managed the school through the amalgamation and her vision continues to drive things forward. The capable senior leaders, staff and governors are now a good team. Teaching, achievement in English, and behaviour management have all been successfully monitored and improved.

The school's self-evaluation, carried out by the head and leadership team, is very good and shows an impressive understanding of strengths and areas for improvement. The school is well placed to develop further. There is a strong commitment to holding all staff accountable for pupils' progress. Provision for children in Reception is well led and managed, giving children a very good start, helping them to have fun and make good progress.

Some curriculum coordinators did not monitor what was happening in their subjects carefully enough. This left gaps in older pupils' knowledge and understanding and led to some underachievement. Improvements are well underway and feature strongly in development planning. Governors, several of whom are new, have undertaken training and have a satisfactory understanding of the school's current position. They give good support to the headteacher and her staff and are beginning to evaluate the school's progress effectively.

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Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall	16-19
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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?	3	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	NA
The quality and standards in foundation stage	2	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	NA
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	NA
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	NA

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3	NA
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	NA
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3	NA
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3	NA

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2	NA
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3	NA
The behaviour of learners	2	NA
The attendance of learners	4	NA
How well learners enjoy their education	2	NA
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	NA
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	NA
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	NA
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3	NA

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3	NA
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3	NA
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3	NA

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3	NA
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3	NA
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	2	NA
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	NA
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	3	NA
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3	NA
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	NA

The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy	
Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily	Yes
Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise	Yes
Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse	Yes
Learners are educated about sexual health	Yes
The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe	
Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements	Yes
Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place	Yes
Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism	Yes
Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them	Yes
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution	
Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships	Yes
Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them	Yes
Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community	Yes
The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being	
There is provision to promote learners' basic skills	Yes
Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams	Yes
Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in key stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form	NA
Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy	NA

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Thanks for your welcome and cooperation when we visited Conifers. You certainly seem to be enjoying all being part of the same school. We can see how much everyone is looking forward to the new building. It was a pleasure to meet children who behaved well and were extremely polite. The way you talked to us honestly about what you like and do not like does you, and the school, credit. The school is good at helping you to grow into sensible people who know what is right and who are prepared to listen.

We found that Conifers provides you with a satisfactory, and improving, standard of education and takes good care of you. We can see that safety procedures are good, which is very important during the building work.

Some subjects need improvements in how they are managed but the school is well run and this makes it possible for staff to help you learn. You get off to a good start in Reception and have all done well to raise standards in English. One of the main reasons is that you are so clear about your literacy targets. Standards in mathematics and science are still not high enough and we have asked teachers to improve the ways in which they find out what you know, understand and can do so that they can help you see how you can do better.

Although we can see that you enjoy school for most of the time, your attendance rates are worse than in most schools. After you are away it is often difficult to catch up and this can make it harder for you. You can make it easier for yourselves by coming to school more regularly.