

# Conifers School

Independent School

Inspection report

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DfES Registration Number	938/6072
Unique Reference Number	126118
Inspection number	301506
Inspection dates	16-17 May 2007
Reporting inspector	John Seal HMI

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 162A of the Education Act 2002 (as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005).

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## Purpose and scope of the inspection

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

## Information about the school

Conifers is a co-educational preparatory school providing for children aged three to eleven years. There are 76 children on roll. The school was established in 1934. It occupies an early 20<sup>th</sup> century house and additional buildings which are converted for educational use, on the outskirts of Midhurst, West Sussex. The school aims state: *'Our focus is on individual development and importance is placed, not only on academic excellence but also on all other areas of learning. We equip each child for the wider world'*. There is no previous inspection report.

## Evaluation of the school

Conifers provides its pupils with a satisfactory education overall which has good features. It is highly valued by the parents, one of whom stated *'There is a warm and friendly feel about the school where children are encouraged to be individuals.'*

The school has some key strengths which include good subject teaching in art, music, dance, French and a wide variety of sports.

All the children are well known to the staff and there is a very caring atmosphere. Some procedures and systems including the assessment of pupils' progress are inconsistent and are not sufficiently robust or rigorous. The school meets most of the regulations for independent schools but has some weaknesses, particularly in relation to the requirements regarding pupils' welfare.

## Quality of education

The curriculum is good. It offers a broad and rich range of activities in lessons and extra-curricular activities. There is good provision for literacy and numeracy. Pupils are encouraged to take on a wide range of activities beyond the school day. There are good opportunities for pupils, including those who are vulnerable and have learning difficulties and disabilities, to progress and develop well.

Pupils follow an effective personal, social, health education programme to enable them to lead healthy lifestyles.

Teaching is satisfactory overall. Where teaching is good, pupils are able to discuss their learning with each other and are challenged to improve their work on a regular basis. Teachers plan interesting lessons which involve practical activities that match pupils' learning needs. Older pupils were seen taking part in discussions about what they were learning and teachers were assessing how much progress the pupils had made whilst the lesson was going on. Specialist lessons are well taught. Pupils were seen making good progress and enjoying their learning in subjects including art, music, dance and French.

In satisfactory lessons, strengths are balanced by weaknesses. Many younger pupils work on the same activities at the same time, regardless of their ability. Pupils do not make as much progress as they could because they either complete their work quickly and have to wait too long for marking or have to continue to work through insufficiently challenging activities in their work books.

Assessment is satisfactory. Records of pupils' attainment are sound. However, procedures for assessing their progress or setting challenging targets for what they need to learn next are not consistent across the school.

Pupils make satisfactory progress overall. After a good start in Reception the rate of progress across the school is inconsistent.

### Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

Provision for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Pupils' behaviour is good. They are polite, courteous, confident and articulate. They are at ease with a range of adults and other pupils. Pupils have enthusiasm for work and responsibility and there is a high rate of attendance. The school provides a daily act of worship which reflects the Christian ethos of the school. Children sing, pray and reflect on moral issues. Opportunities are also taken to celebrate individual effort. During an assembly, children listened well to older pupils playing a range of instruments. Children contribute to their own community, for example they visit Shelter for the Homeless, and raise funds for Macmillan, take part in the Readathon and entertain local elderly people. Their cultural development and awareness of the wider world is supported through events including fundraising for the Tsunami Appeal. Pupils are well prepared for future economic well-being and responsibilities, because of their good work ethic, enthusiasm, and confidence.

### Welfare, health and safety of the pupils

Provision for the welfare, health and safety of children is satisfactory. Staff are committed to ensuring pupils' welfare. Supervision of pupils is good, especially the procedures for crossing the main road to the school's playing field. Pupils feel safe, and say that they know who to go to if they feel worried. Relationships between staff and pupils are good.

Children understand and follow active and healthy lifestyles. There is an appropriate health and safety policy, which ensures that regular safety checks of the building are undertaken. Appropriate risk assessments are carried out, for example, relating to visits away from the school. Procedures for the administration of first aid are sound and the policy offers appropriate guidance to staff. The child protection procedures do not, however fully reflect the latest guidance. The school has yet to plan for better accessibility for those with disabilities.

### Suitability of the proprietor and staff

Not all the Criminal Records Bureau checks on staff appointed after 2003 have been carried out yet. The school is aware of this and has set up appropriate systems to comply with this regulation.

### School's premises and accommodation

Premises and accommodation are of a satisfactory standard. There are a number of well-equipped specialist rooms which are effectively used to teach science, information and communication technology and music. There is a good outdoor play space for break times, although access to the main playing field is across a busy road.

### Provision of information for parents, carers and others

The quality of information to parents and prospective parents is satisfactory. The prospectus is usefully supplemented by a suitable website. Although termly reports identify what pupils have learned, they do not consistently identify what they should need to learn next which does not meet regulation 6 (2)(e). The vast majority of parents think the school provides everything they want for their children.

### Procedures for handling complaints

Parents feel very comfortable about approaching the school with problems, and there have been no formal complaints in the last twelve months. There are a few parents who are unaware of the complaints procedure. Although the school has recently rewritten this policy to ensure it meets regulations, there is no information regarding the timescales for the management of any complaints.

### Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school meets all of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as amended January 2005, with the exception of those listed below.

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of provision for pupils' welfare, health and safety (standard 3) and must:

- prepare and implement written policies to safeguard and promote the welfare of children who are pupils at the school which comply with DfES guidance '*Safeguarding children and safer recruitment in education*' (2007) (paragraph 3(2)(b))
- maintain an admission register and an attendance register (paragraph 3(9)).

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of suitability of proprietor and staff (standard 4) and must:

- prior to the confirmation of the appointment of all staff, check with the CRB to confirm their suitability to work with children (paragraph 4(b)).

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of the provision of information for parents, carers and others (standard 6) and must:

- provide particulars of the school's policy on and arrangements for admissions, discipline and exclusions (paragraph 6(2)(e)).

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of procedures for handling complaints (standard 7) and must:

- ensure that the complaints procedure sets out clear timescales for the management of complaints (paragraph 7(c)).

In order to comply with the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 2002 the school should devise a three-year accessibility plan.

## What the school could do to improve further

While not required by the regulations, the school might wish to consider the following points for development:

- establish a more consistent approach to using assessment information in lesson planning.
- ensure pupils' rates of progress are consistently good across the school.

## School details

Name of school	Conifers School		
DfES number	938/6072		
Unique reference number	126118		
Type of school	Day preparatory school		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	1934		
Age range of pupils	3-11 years		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 11	Girls: 47	Total: 58
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need	Boys: 0	Girls: 1	Total: 1
Number of pupils who are looked after	Boys: 0	Girls: 0	Total: 0
Number of children receiving funded nursery education	Boys: 7	Girls: 11	Total: 18
Annual fees	£1800 - £2512		
Address of school	Egmont Road Midhurst West Sussex GU29 9BG		
Telephone number	01730 813243		
Email address	head@conifersschool.com		
Headteacher	Mrs Louise Fox		
Proprietor	Conifers School		
Reporting inspector	John Seal HMI		
Childcare inspector	Christine Clint CCI		
Dates of inspection	16-17 May 2007		