

Conifers Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	134080
Local Authority	Dorset
Inspection number	328823
Inspection dates	2–3 December 2008
Reporting inspector	Ann Henderson

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

The registered childcare, managed by the governing body, was inspected under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	365
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS	0
Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years	0
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Peter Rendall
Headteacher	Rachel Hiscock
Date of previous school inspection	8 February 2006
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Radipole Lane Weymouth DT4 0QF
Telephone number	01305 771289
Fax number	01305 782762

Age group	4–11
Inspection dates	2–3 December 2008
Inspection number	328823

© Crown copyright 2008

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is a larger than average primary school with Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) provision in two Reception classes. It opened in 2004 following the amalgamation of two schools and moved into a new school building in 2006. Most pupils are of White British heritage although there are an increasing number of pupils from minority ethnic groups and pupils who speak English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or difficulties is well above the national average. Many of these pupils have speech, language or communication difficulties; others have behavioural, emotional or social problems. The school has received several awards in recognition of its work in promoting the arts, sports and ecological awareness.

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 School is a satisfactory school where pupils learn and develop in a safe and supportive environment. The headteacher and senior leaders have successfully transferred the school into its new accommodation. With her staff, the headteacher has created a very welcoming and positive school climate which is appreciated by pupils and their parents. Strengths include the good personal development of pupils, which is encouraged by good pastoral support enabling pupils to feel secure and enjoy school. As one parent said, 'I think the staff are very encouraging to my daughter, she feels valued and her ideas and opinions are listened to.' In addition, parents value the opportunities to share in their children's learning. Children in the Reception class settle quickly at the start of the school day and enjoy a variety of learning activities alongside parents and other adults. Pupils' achievement is satisfactory by the time they leave in Year 6. On entry to the school, pupils' attainment is well below expected levels, particularly in their communication and language skills. From this very low starting point, children make satisfactory progress. Standards by the end of Year 2 are below average in reading, writing and mathematics, particularly in writing. Standards by the end of Year 6 are below average, and writing remains a relative weakness. Poor writing skills through the school are a barrier to more rapid progress in all subjects. Pupils enjoy school and this is reflected in their comments and their keen participation in all school activities. Pupils are friendly and polite and relate very well to others. They are particularly good at supporting each other. Behaviour is good in lessons and around the school. Pupils' increasing maturity and awareness of others is a reflection of the attention the school pays to nurturing their personal development. Satisfactory teaching and learning and a sound curriculum enable pupils to make satisfactory progress. Across the school, teachers have good relationships with their pupils. They create a good climate for learning in which pupils try hard to do their best. Pupils make good progress when they are challenged with interesting and exciting tasks that are well matched to their abilities. However, this good practice is not consistent across the school. Some lessons are too teacher-directed and the pace of learning slows. Others fail to excite and fully engage the pupils. Leadership and management are satisfactory, and the school has rightly prioritised the raising of standards and improving the quality of teaching. However, monitoring is not robust enough to ensure that action taken to secure improvements is followed through consistently. The school has successfully raised standards in mathematics and has a satisfactory capacity for further improvement.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 3

Children in Reception start school with skills well below those expected of their age, and they make satisfactory progress. Some reach the expected levels for their age by the start of Year 1, but attainment is well below that expected, particularly in their writing and communication skills. Children benefit greatly from learning in the new accommodation, which allows good scope for imaginative play and for learning in a shared space, both indoors and outdoors. Teachers and their assistants support children effectively, particularly those with language difficulties. The safety of children is a priority and all safeguarding procedures are in place. Behaviour is well managed and children learn to make independent choices. Links with parents are purposeful and productive; some remark on how much their children enjoy learning. The EYFS is soundly led and managed in a way that recognises what needs to be improved. Activities

are not always closely matched to the individual needs of children, although the school is rightly planning to monitor progress more carefully throughout the year.

What the school should do to improve further

- Monitor with greater rigour to enable expectations to be raised and ensure more consistently good teaching.
- Provide greater challenge, excitement and interest in learning, and ensure tasks meet the individual needs of all pupils.
- Raise standards in writing, particularly in Years 1 and 2.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Pupils' performance in national tests at the end of Year 6 in 2008 was below average in English, mathematics and science. While standards in mathematics rose as a result of successful action taken, standards in English fell, particularly in writing, and some pupils underachieved. More than half the pupils in this cohort had learning difficulties and overall, progress was satisfactory. In national assessments at the end of Year 2, there has been a declining trend in performance in reading, writing and mathematics. The school has put measures in place to tackle this and pupils are now achieving satisfactorily. Pupils' progress accelerates as they move through the school, and ironing out the inconsistent progress made by pupils through the school is a key priority for improvement. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those who speak English as an additional language make satisfactory progress because of well-targeted support. Increasing numbers of pupils are starting school with a deficit in language skills, and attainment in writing is a relative weakness through the school. Targets in 2008 were not met. The school has set ambitious targets for performance at the end of Years 2 and 6 in 2009. This is proving an important step in raising expectations of both teachers and the pupils themselves.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils behave well and show concern and consideration for others. They work well together when given the opportunity and show appreciation of each others' efforts. This was evident in a Year 6 assembly when pupils were very supportive of the achievements of their peers. Pupils show good awareness of safe practices and generally have a good understanding of how to stay safe. They also show good understanding of health-related issues which arise through their work in science, design and technology and the programme for personal, social and health education. In Year 1, pupils particularly enjoyed their project on making fruit kebabs! Attendance is improving and is satisfactory, reflecting pupils' increasing enjoyment of school and the range of activities provided. The school council plays an important role in decision making, with members taking seriously their responsibilities for the organisation of their meetings. They make a satisfactory contribution to the school community. Pupils are well prepared for later life in terms of their social skills and attitudes, but relatively weak literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) skills, and limited opportunities to develop enterprise skills mean that overall, pupils' preparation for their future is satisfactory.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Learning is characterised by good relationships and sense of partnership. This generates positive attitudes and pupils are keen to try hard and do their best. Classrooms are well managed and the challenging behaviour and energy of a small number of pupils are harnessed well. Pupils respond particularly well to activities which are practical and where they are active participants. Tasks are usually well chosen to make learning interesting and fun, though this is not always the case. Many pupils lack confidence in their ability to succeed and teachers work hard to encourage pupils through a frequent use of praise to build their self-esteem. Less progress is made when teachers fail to assess how well pupils understand the work and do not adapt their planning accordingly to build on prior learning and thereby meet the individual needs of pupils. Self-assessment is sometimes used well but this is inconsistent. Expectations are not always high enough and pupils are not always set work which stretches them and makes them think more deeply. Marking is regular and supportive and increasingly helps pupils move their learning forward. Teaching assistants provide effective support and work collaboratively to assist individuals and groups of pupils.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum meets the needs of different groups of pupils, although planning is not always well geared to the needs of individual pupils. Pupils are given a reasonable range of opportunities to use literacy, numeracy and ICT across a range of subjects, but there is more to be done to ensure this really makes a difference to pupils' attainment, particularly in writing. The school rightly recognises that there is a need to link subjects across the curriculum to make learning more relevant and exciting. Pupils are offered a good range of opportunities to extend their learning outside of lessons through themed days and weeks, extra-curricular activities, visits and visitors. The well-structured modern foreign language programme in Years 3 and 4 has enabled pupils to make good progress in French. Good attention is paid to personal, social and health education, which is a key factor in pupils' good personal development.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Good care is taken of pupils to ensure that they feel safe in school. Parents are positive about this aspect, making comments such as, 'I am very happy with the care and education my child receives.' Good quality support for pupils with learning difficulties and/or difficulties ensures that they are fully included in all activities. Families are provided with support to help their children learn. Pupils are encouraged to attend school regularly and there have been improvements, although the attendance of a small number of pupils continues to be a cause for concern. The recent introduction of pupil progress reviews is providing good opportunities for the progress of every pupil to be monitored. However, this practice needs to be more fully rooted in practice. Marking and feedback to pupils are generally good with some 'how to improve' targets, but inconsistencies remain.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Senior leaders have successfully established a sense of common purpose and a clear vision for the school. Staff work closely together and there is a good sense of teamwork. The headteacher and her staff are working successfully to establish good partnerships with parents and support vulnerable pupils. Self-evaluation is accurate and realistic. Having identified mathematics as a weaker area, the school has taken successful steps to ensure improvement. However, weaknesses remain, most notably in the standards of writing. Action has now been taken and challenging targets for pupils' performance have been set. Monitoring is regular but is not followed through with enough rigour to ensure action to tackle weaknesses is always taken. The school improvement plan correctly identifies areas for improvement and is well set out with clear responsibilities. The school's contribution to community cohesion is adequate, and it is beginning to broaden pupils' understanding of the global community by linking with Kenya. Governors are led by the loyal chair, who visits the school regularly. Governors currently lack confidence in their monitoring role but this is developing securely.

Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
---	----------------

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
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	3
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	3
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	3
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	3
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	3
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	3

Achievement and standards

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

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

Personal development and well-being

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

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	3
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	3
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

3 December 2008

Dear Children

Inspection of Conifers Primary School, Weymouth, DT4 0QF

Thank you for the friendly welcome we received during our recent visit to your school. We enjoyed talking with you and looking at your work. We think your school is providing you with a satisfactory education. With your help, we are sure that the headteacher and all the staff in the school will make your school even better.

We were impressed with your good attitudes to work and how well most of you get on together. We would like to thank the school council for sharing their views with us and were pleased to see how many of you take responsibility at school. Most of you try hard in your lessons and many teachers make lessons interesting, challenging and enjoyable. We have asked your headteacher to make sure all your lessons are like this and to help all teachers give you things to do which are suited to each one of you. You are doing well in reading and your mathematics is improving. We were pleased to see how many of you attend the good opportunities for out-of-school activities. We think that you could improve your writing still further and have asked the teachers to help you. We have also asked the teachers to check how things are going with greater care to ensure that you always have the best opportunities.

We enjoyed our visit to your school and we wish all of you the very best for the future.

Yours sincerely

Ann Henderson Lead inspector