

Conifers School

Independent school inspection report

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Reporting inspector	Elisabeth Linley HMI

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Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester
M2 7LA

T: 08456 404040
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

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Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out by Ofsted under Section 162A¹ of the Education Act 2002, as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005², the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

The inspection of registered provision³ was conducted under Section 49(2) of the Childcare Act 2006.⁴

Information about the school

Conifers School was established in 1934. It is an independent day school in Midhurst, West Sussex for boys and girls aged from two to eleven years and provides before- and after-school care facilities for pupils who attend. The school also provides extended activities for the locality through its free Saturday morning clubs and the mother and toddler group. Currently, there are 91 pupils on roll; of these, 30 attend part-time and 19 children receive nursery funding. Registered provision for children under the age of three was last inspected in September 2009 and the main school's last inspection was in May 2007. Although not previously the case, the school's provision for the Early Years Foundation Stage, which includes pre-school and reception-aged children, is now inspected with the rest of the school. The school aims to provide its pupils with:

'nursery and preparatory education in a small, secure, intimate and nurturing environment, to produce wonderfully confident, happy, well-rounded and successful children with a wide range of experiences and the highest possible standard of education, whilst maintaining a friendly, family environment'.

Evaluation of the school

Conifers School provides a good quality of education and successfully meets its aims. The overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage is good. Pupils in the junior and senior classes also benefit from a good curriculum and good quality teaching. The school has satisfactory procedures in place to ensure that all safeguarding arrangements are secure; pupils' welfare, health and safety are satisfactory and the provision of pastoral care is good. As a result, pupils' confidence and self-esteem develop well; their behaviour is outstanding and pupils make good

¹ www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2002/ukpga_20020032_en_14#pt10-ch1-pb4-l1g162

² www.opsi.gov.uk/ACTS/acts2005/ukpga_20050018_en_15#sch8

³ Schools which provide childcare for children from birth until the term in which they reach their third birthday must register this provision separately with Ofsted.

⁴ www.opsi.gov.uk/ACTS/acts2006/ukpga_20060021_en_4#pt3-ch2-pb4-l1g49

progress in their learning. Conifers School has improved since its last inspection and now meets all but two of the regulations for independent schools.

Quality of education

The curriculum is good and fundamental to the good quality education provided by the school. It is broad and balanced and provides rigorous coverage of English and mathematics. In addition, there is an effective focus on cross-curricular provision throughout the school from toddlers in the Early Years Foundation Stage to Year 6. The school benefits from the inspirational vision of the headteacher for the curriculum and its use, to aid pupils' good achievement. This is exemplified by pupils' work from a whole-school topic on 'structure and pattern'. With the help of a visiting expert, pupils completed a 'camp build' on the school field and were able to weave with hazel-rods, for example, to make a main entrance. The work was then linked across the curriculum and pupils learnt about the 'patchwork' of the family in personal, social and health education (PSHE) while producing high quality art, written work and mathematical investigations. Displays of pupils' work throughout school are of high quality and provide clear evidence of their achievement and well above average attainment. Their art work in particular is of high quality as seen in Year 4 and the pupils' paintings in the style of Renoir. The school's provision for extra-curricular activities is also very good and includes a wide range of sporting and music activities plus the after-school care club where pupils say they value the opportunity to be able to complete their homework if they wish.

Pupils at Conifers School benefit from specialist teaching in subjects such as art, dance, music, physical education, information and communication technology (ICT), French and science. Where one-to-one provision is organised, for example to meet pupils' specific needs in dyslexia, it is well planned and effective. However, pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities do not benefit from a consistent approach to meeting their needs. Planning in small steps towards targets, against which pupils' progress can be regularly measured and evaluated, is not of consistently good quality.

Teaching and assessment are good and much improved since the last inspection. Characteristics of good and better teaching throughout school, including in the Early Years Foundation Stage, include well-planned activities that are matched effectively to pupils' different needs and effective links that are made between subjects. Where outstanding teaching was seen, for example in a Year 2 mathematics lesson, there was a very good pace to the lesson, no time was lost, and the use of different practical activities was vital to underpin pupils' learning and aid their understanding. However, where teaching is satisfactory, opportunities are sometimes missed to challenge pupils in their thinking and to apply their skills to new tasks. In addition, teachers sometimes intervene too quickly in order to help and direct pupils, thus limiting opportunities for them to develop their independence.

Assessment is much better than it was at the last inspection. Pupils' work is regularly marked and in the best examples there are clear comments about what pupils need to do to improve. However, there are some inconsistencies in the way individual teachers record pupils' progress, analyse the data gathered and set targets for pupils' improvement. The overall tracking of pupils' progress in the school, however, is clear and shows that pupils make good progress. The results of the Common Entrance examinations also confirm the success of pupils at Conifers School, particularly given that pupils often gain scholarships to the school of their choice.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

The school places a high emphasis on the arts, music and cultural experiences for all pupils, including children in the Early Years Foundation Stage. During the inspection, pupils from Years 1 to 6 visited the Chichester Festival Theatre to hear the Southern Pro Musica Symphony Orchestra perform a 'Children's Concert' which they very much enjoyed. Such opportunities contribute well to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development which is good. Pupils benefit from the positive experience at the beginning of every day when the school and visitors join for assembly to worship and celebrate each other's achievements. It is no surprise that they enjoy school and that their attendance is good. Pupils are courteous and polite and take great pride in their roles and responsibilities within school. These include positions such as head girl, house captain, form captain and librarian. Pupils are proud of their school and of their work to support the wider community.

They learn about British institutions through the curriculum and through visits and workshops from the Life Education Centre and the local policeman. Plans are already in place to use opportunities from the forthcoming election to extend pupils' learning further. Pupils develop a good understanding of other faiths through religious studies. However, pupils' understanding of the different cultures and ethnic heritage of others is less well developed and the school recognises that more needs to be done in this respect, given Britain's multicultural society. Pupils have a clear understanding of right and wrong and their behaviour is outstanding. They develop very positive relationships with one another; as one pupil wrote, 'Everybody is happy and wants to be your friend.' Pupils are confident, resourceful and work very well with others, and with the good progress they make, pupils are very well prepared for the next steps in their education and their future economic well-being.

Welfare, health and safety of the pupils

Provision for the welfare, health and safety of pupils is satisfactory. This is because the school's safeguarding policy, while in place, has required some updating to reflect recent guidance. In addition, the school's admission and attendance registers have not been maintained as required; this regulation was not met at the school's last inspection. Staff have received training for child protection and staff are booked to attend the required multi-agency training during the current term. First aid procedures are appropriate and all staff have received the appropriate training.

Health and safety procedures for educational visits are in place and fire risk assessments are carried out by external consultants. All other policies meet requirements.

Staff provide high quality care for pupils' individual pastoral needs. Pupils say that they feel very safe in school and know who to go to if they have any concerns or a problem. They also report that through science and PSHE they learn about keeping safe and older pupils say they are made aware of the dangers of alcohol, drugs and smoking. Pupils understand the importance of maintaining a healthy lifestyle and very much enjoy taking part in the many sporting activities that are available for them. Their understanding is supported well through the effective teaching of physical education. This was demonstrated in a lesson for pupils in Years 5 and 6 when, through an outstanding warm-up session, they were building up their fitness and stamina. Younger pupils are also very clear about how to keep healthy through their diet. Displays of their work, on what constitutes a well-balanced meal for example, exemplify this in their classroom.

In working to meet the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 2002, the school has planned well to increase accessibility and will be drawing up a further plan to review the possibility of further improving access.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

The school has implemented appropriate arrangements for the appointment of staff. With the exception of the required check to confirm the medical fitness of staff, all checks have been completed and recorded as required in a single, central register.

School's premises and accommodation

The school's premises provide a pleasant and effective environment for learning. The specialist rooms are well equipped and used effectively for the teaching of science, art, music and ICT. Good use is also made of the school's hall for physical education and dance. All areas of the school are kept clean and tidy and are used well to celebrate pupils' achievements through high quality displays of their work. The outdoor play area meets the needs of all pupils, including the very youngest children in the Early Years Foundation Stage. The school's field, located across the road, is used well for sporting activities and recreation time.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

All regulations are met in respect of the information provided for parents, carers and others. The school's comprehensive website ensures that readers are kept well informed of daily events, school policies that are available upon request and updated information on the school's work. In addition, examples of the pupils' work are celebrated and shared through the website and through the Conifers Chronicle.

Further information is made available to parents on a regular basis through another leaflet, the Conifers Crier. Parents are supportive of the school and the comment of one expressed the views of many: 'It is an excellent environment in which our child is growing in knowledge and confidence. A little gem of a school.'

Procedures for handling complaints

The school's procedures for handling complaints meet all the regulations.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

The effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage, including the registered provision for children under three years of age, is good and well led and managed. Children's personal development is outstanding. Parents and toddler group sessions enable children to settle quickly, develop confidence rapidly, feel safe and secure and enjoy their first experiences of school. The curriculum for all children provides a good range of activities that are enhanced by visits to places such as local parks and farms. Small class numbers help staff meet children's needs well, and there is a good balance of teacher-led and child-initiated activities. Teaching is good. Staff make effective use of opportunities to extend children's language; consequently, children's speaking, listening and reasoning skills, including the very young toddler groups, are highly developed. Staff create a welcoming and stimulating environment in which all children enjoy learning very much and make good progress. Robust systems are in place to assess children's work and their progress is tracked rigorously. This has shown that children's attainment in number calculation is lower than other areas and, although this has not yet received focused attention, the school has plans to address the issue. Children's achievements are regularly praised and they are keen to work independently and with their friends, for example in the outdoor area. Children show from an early age that they are caring and respectful of others. Children's welfare is promoted appropriately; staff provide high quality day-to-day care with effective links being established with parents and carers.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school meets all of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as amended ('the Regulations'), 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:

- maintain an admission register and attendance register in accordance with the Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006 (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, carry out and complete checks to confirm medical fitness (paragraph 4(2)(a)).

What the school could do to improve further

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

- Ensure that the data gathered from records of pupils' progress are analysed and used effectively to set targets for focused work and improvement.
- Improve the planning of work for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities to show the small and measurable targets set for their development, against which their progress can be measured.
- Extend pupils' understanding of the different cultures and ethnic heritage of others.

Inspection Judgement Recording Form

outstanding	good	satisfactory	inadequate
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The quality of education

Overall quality of education		✓		
How well the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of pupils		✓		
How effective teaching and assessment are in meeting the full range of pupils' needs		✓		
How well pupils make progress in their learning		✓		

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

Quality of provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development		✓		
The behaviour of pupils	✓			

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

The overall welfare, health and safety of pupils			✓	
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The quality of the Early Years Foundation Stage provision

How good are the outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage?		✓		
What is the quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage?		✓		
How effectively is the Early Years Foundation Stage led and managed?		✓		
Overall effectiveness: how well does the school meet the needs of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage?		✓		

School details

Name of school	Conifers School		
DCSF number	938/6072		
Unique reference number (URN)	126118		
EY URN (for registered childcare only)	374929		
Type of school	Independent Co-educational		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	1934		
Age range of pupils	2–11		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 19	Girls: 42	Total: 61
Number on roll (part-time pupils)	Boys: 16	Girls: 14	Total: 30
Number of pupils aged 0–3 in registered childcare provision	Boys: 10	Girls: 6	Total: 16
Annual fees (day pupils)	£8,190		
Annual fees (childcare)	£615.45 – £1,230.90		
Address of school	Egmont Road, Easebourne, Midhurst, West Sussex GU29 9BG		
Telephone number	01730 813243		
Fax number	01730 813382		
Email address	head@conifersschool.com		
Headteacher	Mrs Jennie Peel		
Proprietor	Conifers School		
Reporting inspector	Elisabeth Linley HMI		
Dates of inspection	3–4 February 2010		