

St Nicholas Special School

Inspection report for residential special school

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Inspector	Sophie Wood
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About this inspection

The purpose of this inspection is to assure children and young people, parents, the public, local authorities and government of the quality and standard of the service provided. The inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000.

This report details the main strengths and any areas for improvement identified during the inspection. The judgements included in the report are made in relation to the outcome for children set out in the Children Act 2004 and relevant National Minimum Standards for the establishment.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding:	this aspect of the provision is of exceptionally high quality
Good:	this aspect of the provision is strong
Satisfactory:	this aspect of the provision is sound
Inadequate:	this aspect of the provision is not good enough

Service information

Brief description of the service

St Nicholas school is a residential special school, providing day and boarding places to boys aged between 11 and 16 years, who have a primary need in relation to their emotional / behavioural difficulties. A number of pupils have additional needs, including language difficulties and health conditions, which may have a minor or major impact upon their learning potential. The school is situated within a residential area and has easy access to nearby shops and community amenities. The weekly boarding provision is situated within a separate area of the main school building. One area accommodates those in years 7 to 9, the adjoining area is for those in years 10 and 11. A team of highly motivated residential care staff create a safe, nurturing environment, which focuses upon improving social skills and providing additional and complementary learning opportunities.

Summary

This announced key inspection was conducted by two inspectors over two consecutive days. All of the key standards were inspected, previous recommendations were followed up and a number of additional standards were explored, due to the inadequacies of the physical premises. Policies, procedures and various records were scrutinised, key personnel were interviewed, a number of parents were spoken with and much time was spent in direct private consultation with the boarders. Evening activities were joined, as were all mealtimes and excellent sources of evidence were obtained through direct observation. The school continues to show signs of systematic improvement and this is having a positive impact on the boys' behaviour and general feelings of well being. The boarding team is led by a dynamic and motivated leader, whose enthusiasm is mirrored by every member of the team. Shortfalls have been identified with regards the physical premises and monitoring systems. These were positively received at the feedback meeting and are clearly identified within the text of this report.

The overall quality rating is good.

This is an overview of what the inspector found during the inspection.

Improvements since the last inspection

The school received 17 recommendations from its last inspection report. Those identifying shortfalls in child protection procedures and records have been fully implemented and there are clear improvements with regards accident records and medication administration logs. The swimming pool area is now safe and various other health and safety processes have also improved. The healthy eating project has been reviewed and the decanting of certain foods has ceased. All personnel files now hold written job descriptions and advice has been sought from the local authority personnel department regarding the appropriate storage of CRB certificates. Induction processes for new staff have improved tremendously. The recommendations pertaining to complaint's recording, providing equal opportunities training for staff involved with recruitment and the overall monitoring of records have not been fully implemented; however, plans are in place to rectify these shortfalls.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

Boarders positively benefit by having their health needs assessed and met. The care team implement the school's written guidance and although clear, this is subject to ongoing review

and amendment. Health care records are securely stored, as is medication and first aid equipment. Parents supply written consent for all potential treatments and interventions; they send in medication in accordance with the school's own policy. Care staff receive external first aid and medication administration training; records of medicines being administered show no errors. Systems are in place to effectively refer to and liaise with external health care agencies, such as speech and language therapy. A Children's and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) worker is based at the school for one day each week and partnership social workers also spend a number of days on site. They liaise most effectively between the school and parents, ensuring a steady flow of information is being appropriately shared. Key worker meetings and themed evenings within the boarding provision are being effectively used to discuss health and hygiene related topics and an additional physical activity has been added to the evening boarding programme. There is ongoing liaison with the local authority school nurse and if health appointments are needed during boarding time, the boys choose the staff member to accompany them. Where appropriate, boys are encouraged to take responsibility and make such appointments themselves. Much emphasis is being placed upon the healthy eating guidance available to the boys. The two boarding areas are equipped with their own kitchens and the boys are actively involved with menu planning, food shopping and meal preparation. The boys say, "the food is good here, it keeps you healthy". As is appropriate to their age, older boys spend even more time in their kitchen and all pupils within the school now have cookery lessons with the catering manager, who also focuses upon the important aspect of budgeting alongside meal planning. Boarders receive their lunch time meal with their peers in the main school dining room. This is a relaxed, though structured affair, with a staff member sitting at every table, serving from a variety of options. The school made a clear decision to cease with the previous canteen style delivery and instances of disruption have dramatically reduced as a result. The boys say they really enjoy lunchtimes and they like the choice of meals provided. The catering manager is suitably qualified and experienced and has worked at the school for many years. She demonstrates compliance with the Environmental Health Department, although the main kitchen presents health and safety hazards, due to its layout and structure. This aspect has been raised within EHO reports, however; the remedy is beyond the catering manager's control. The breakfast and evening meals for boarders are entirely provided within the boarding provision. All care staff have received food hygiene training and the two kitchen areas are clean and sufficiently equipped. The dining area for younger boarders is inadequate and the transporting of food and utensils to and from the kitchen presents unnecessary health and safety risks. Despite this, the quality of the food provided is wholesome and nutritious and the boys say there is always enough, in terms of quality and quantity. Both mealtimes were joined and staff are commended for their efforts to ensure such occasions are relaxed and sociable, whilst ensuring appropriate social conduct is respected. The boys are particularly positive about the numerous themed meals that have recently occurred, whereby the celebrations and religions of other cultures are explored, alongside eating traditional foods associated with the particular country. The most recent project concerned China and on the evening of this inspection, the boys were learning about St Patrick's Day and were eating Irish stew, albeit that rabbit was replaced with beef due to consultation with the boys! The school has recently been accredited with the Sports Mark Award and is working towards achieving the Healthy Schools Award.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is satisfactory.

The care team implements sound procedural guidance, which serves to protect boarders' confidential information. Their practice ensures such information is sensitively handled and

shared appropriately. Boarders confirm their understanding and satisfaction with this process. They also know how to complain, both within the school and through accessing external agencies. Notice boards provide clear information and the boys have the ability to make private telephone calls. They frequently say they do not need to use the formal complaint's processes available because the staff deal with their issues as soon as they tell them. When asked about safety, complaints and bullying, the boys said, "we are very safe at school". Written records are being held to record complaints from pupils and third parties and these logs are being monitored. Close scrutiny identifies some shortfalls in these recordings and there are occasional issues which have not been recorded as a complaint, whilst the content may suggest otherwise. The child protection policy and procedure is clear and all staff receive appropriate guidance and training, commensurate with their roles and responsibilities. The school has three designated child protection coordinators and all staff know who these individuals are. They are also conversant with the school's whistle blowing procedure. An anti-bullying policy is in place and the boys are confident that instances of bullying are being effectively managed. One boarder said, "sure it happens sometimes, but the staff deal with it, they don't want anyone to be scared at school". There is a clear desire from the school to understand and support those who engage in bullying behaviour by taking an educative approach to this issue. This does not lessen the message that it is unacceptable and instances are being expediently and appropriately dealt with, whilst ensuring full support is provided to the victim. Systems for monitoring such incidents are evolving; however, shortfalls remain in terms of identifying patterns and trends. Written records demonstrate that the school continues to notify appropriate external agencies of significant events. The school's process for notifying Ofsted has been satisfactorily updated. Other records show two examples of unauthorised absences within the boarding provision this year. This was a single event involving two boys and it was resolved within hours, with appropriate action taken. The school strictly monitors the attendance of all of its pupils. A particular strength of the school is its behaviour management programme. The boys are fully conversant with school rules; they know exactly what to expect in terms of sanctions and punishments. Comments from older boys include, "it's stricter here than it used to be, but that's a good thing, because it's safer" and "you can't get away with the things you could before, but there are loads of ways to earn rewards now". The Deputy Head of Care is a qualified positive handling trainer for the local authority and all care staff are up to date with this training. The policy and procedure advocates the use of physical intervention as a last resort and it clearly lists acceptable and unacceptable means of intervention. The training focuses heavily upon the positive use of de-escalation techniques. Written records are made following all physical interventions and these are scrutinised by the Head of Care. Patterns and trends are identified and this information is graphed and shared with the senior leadership team and board of governors. Records of other sanctions are being completed; however, there are some gaps within the overall chronological log book. More positively, improved monitoring has found one type of sanction to be ineffective and as a result, it has been removed. The rewards system is steeped in positive reinforcement and gives the boys points for all manner of positive conduct. Points can be used as currency for a wide range of items including, outings, prizes and additional activities, such as access to televisions, computer games and later bedtimes. The boys are fully conversant with this whole process and say they are far more likely to engage in positive conduct than they were before. Ongoing works to the physical environment have improved the safety, security and aesthetics of the premises. A rolling programme of maintenance and repairs is underway and there are clear systems in place for staff to alert the site manager to any perceived health and safety concerns. The site manager is highly motivated and is working extremely hard to improve the physical premises. He conducts regular health and safety tours across the

entire site with a school governor and the findings inform the school's project of works, which is monitored through governor's meetings. Buildings within the school are secure; key pads restrict access appropriately and additional CCTV has been added. A rolling programme of portable appliance testing (PAT) is in place and gas and boiler checks are up to date, albeit the recent appointment for Legionella testing was cancelled by the contractor and is being chased by the site manager. As was recommended from the previous inspection, the swimming pool has appropriate life saving equipment in place and the site manager advised that the wooden panelling in some of the bedrooms has been removed. It was noted; however, that this remains within one of the bedrooms seen. Boarders are fully conversant with the fire evacuation procedure and records show this is practised during the day and evening. A fire risk assessment and audit has been completed by an external consultant and the site manager is currently implementing the recommendations made from this; however, with no clear data base system in place, it is difficult to ascertain precisely the progress made thus far. All first floor windows within the boarding areas are suitably restricted and hot water supplies to showers and baths are thermostatically controlled. No obvious systems are in place to check these remain fully functional. The recruitment policy and procedure is sound and robust; however, it has not been strictly adhered to in one case. Contrary to its guidance, a new employee was able to commence prior to a criminal records bureau (CRB) certificate being received, albeit written references had been secured and a clear CRB has now been returned. As an additional interim safeguard, this individual had no unsupervised access to pupils until the check was received. The bursar confirms all written references are followed up by telephone verification, yet the close scrutiny of personnel files does not always find this recorded in writing. Recent developments have included pupils' presence on interview panels and those who participated with recent interviews confirmed they received clear guidance from the staff. A recommendation was made from the previous inspection to provide all those involved with staff recruitment to undertake equal opportunities / diversity training and as yet, this has not occurred.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

Care files hold clear details of educational targets and boarders receive the support they need to complete homework. Verbal handovers are conducted between teaching and boarding staff each morning and afternoon and boarders have access to books and educational board games throughout the evening. The Assistant Head and the care team discuss care plans and targets at the end of each term and key workers attend annual reviews. Where necessary, care staff provide additional classroom support and effective behaviour management programmes focus upon increased school attendance. Activities during boarding evenings are regularly used to focus upon additional learning, for example, exploring other cultures and the Deputy Head of Care is currently introducing a number of science projects. The range of leisure activities available to the boys is commended and a good number of day pupils request to join in with such pursuits. Boarding evenings are very busy and active; however, care is taken to ensure sufficient time is provided to relax and wind down ready for bed. Due to the structure and balance of evening activities, there is little time for the boys to become bored and therefore engage in negative behaviour. Those spoken with say the activities are fun and have been devised from direct consultation with the boarders. During the evening of the inspection, older boys went out for a meal with a staff member and the younger ones learnt about St Patrick's day and expended much energy running around the site in teams led by staff members, trying to win a treasure hunt. All care staff are required to plan and lead activities during the evenings and teachers are encouraged to visit the boarding areas for social events. Activities include, outdoor sports,

local walks, cinema trips, use of the sports hall, access to computers, television, games stations and DVD's, listening to music, table top games and craft activities. The recent introduction of an Every Child Matters (ECM) Coordinator post is already having a positive effect. The post holder continues to teach personal and social development in school and also works a number of evenings within the boarding provision. She acts as a link between the teaching and boarding departments and is concentrating upon developing a programme of activities and learning which reflects the aims and objectives of the Every Child Matters outcome groups. Boarders positively benefit by having a range of staff within the school to support their various personal needs. Partnership social workers and health professionals are routine visitors and the National Youth Advisory Service (NYAS) has recently confirmed the appointment of a new independent listener, whose details are advertised throughout the school. Whilst a clear key worker system is in place, the boys fully understand this relationship is not exclusive. Indeed, they are encouraged to seek support from any member of staff they feel comfortable with. This is reflected in practice by way of the boys working with staff to devise a list of the three people they most prefer to go to in times of personal need. Access to these individuals is facilitated when needed.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

Boarders enjoy excellent levels of communication and consultation with the school. They talk very positively about the student council and use this forum effectively. Questionnaires are routinely used to gather their views and opinions about activities and food. Their responses have a direct impact upon provision and one boarder recently sat on the interview panel for the newest recruit to the boarding team. The boys talk very fondly about the boarding staff. They say, "they care about us and make us feel safe". Older boarders say, "the new Head Teacher is strict, but fair. It is much better than it used to be". Staff engage positively with those in their care; there is much humour and laughter within the boarding provision, whilst appropriate boundaries are maintained. The team is vigilant in looking for signs of difficulty and interact quickly to diffuse potential situations. This approach works and the use of diversionary tactics reduces the need to engage in physical interventions. Assessment and admission processes are sound. The boys say they were well prepared for joining the school and a number have benefited from a phased entry into boarding. The partnership social workers assist greatly with the admissions process, passing relevant key information between home and school. Care plans are clear and focused; the boys understand these and work hard to achieve their targets, which are appropriate to their needs. Key workers attend annual reviews and boarding targets are reviewed at the end of each term. The Head of Care routinely liaises with the Assistant Head Teacher in order to examine the balance between educational and boarding targets. Handovers occur between the two departments at the beginning and end of the school day; however, there is no formal structure for tutors and key workers to undertake ongoing intermittent reviews of care planning. The boys maintain regular and ongoing contact with their families during the boarding week. One parent said, "he often doesn't ring because he is busy having a good time, but the staff contact me regularly". The majority of boys have their own mobile telephones; however, a private pay phone is in place for their use and they can also use email. Written records in care files show that key workers contact parents, at least fortnightly and more often if this is needed. Another parent said, "the boarding staff keep you well informed. I have no concerns".

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is inadequate.

All of the boys change into their own clothes at the end of the school day. They are able to obtain the personal requisites they need and older boys can go to nearby shops independently, as is appropriate to their age. Support and guidance is in place for the safe keeping and use of pocket money and the boys have their own key to their bedroom doors, which provides good security for their personal possessions. Although none of the boarders are 'looked after' by their own local authority, the school is keen to provide older boys with the skills and experiences they need to prepare them for impending adulthood. Within teaching, much emphasis is currently being placed upon the introduction of vocational courses and boarders are encouraged to engage in practical 'life skills', such as shopping for food, preparing meals and assisting with domestic tasks. The boarding accommodation presents barriers to this aspect of service provision, despite the very best efforts of the staff team. Older boys complain of a lack of privacy due to their living space being adjacent to the area designated for younger boarders. Recent work has been completed to improve the privacy aspect of bathrooms and one staff member is commended for her efforts in redecorating the main bathroom in the younger boys' provision. Older boarders say they tend to use one shower in particular, as the second one often runs cold and has inadequate pressure. Despite the very best efforts of the staff, the living areas appear institutionalised simply by their design. This is not purpose built boarding accommodation. Wash basins are situated at either end of the dining area for the younger boys. This is wholly inappropriate and there is no natural light to this space. This area is also a thoroughfare to the kitchen, bathroom, bedrooms and the medical room and presents health and safety hazards during mealtimes. There are areas of carpeting, which have been taped over due to wear and tear and the quality of furniture is variable. Again, the staff have used pictures, bright colours, cushions and throws in an attempt to improve the aesthetics and the boys are encouraged to personalise their rooms with posters and personal items. There is greater ownership of the boys with single bedrooms. The shared dormitory appears cramped and poorly furnished. Despite the use of hardboard screens, this room offers minimal privacy to its occupants. Plans have been drawn, detailing proposed refurbished boarding accommodation, which includes an entirely separate building for older boarders. The senior leadership team has produced detailed proposals to assist with this venture, which includes selling unused assets and a local charitable organisation has offered to meet half of the costs of building the senior boys' house. Thus far, there has been no confirmation from the local authority to proceed with these plans.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

The school provides clear written guidance for all of its stakeholders. Parents confirm their understanding and the boys are clear about rules and procedures, despite the number of recent changes. These have been delivered in a timely and balanced manner to ensure everyone's understanding. Guidance for staff, in the form of policies and procedures, continues to be reviewed and updated. The induction programme and subsequent regularity of supervision meetings ensures information is effectively disseminated. Duty rosters show good staffing levels, which ensure the safety and supervision of the boys. The staff team feels very well supported by the senior leadership team and there is minimal sickness absence. Care records show evidence of the progress made by boarders and the information within is clear and informative. All staff have personal development plans and mandatory training is up to date. One staff member has recently completed NVQ level 3 training and another has just commenced.

Duty rosters show appropriate staffing levels are being maintained. The Head of Care is suitably qualified and experienced. She has an open and inclusive style of leadership, which gives the care team appropriate autonomy and responsibilities commensurate with their roles. This encourages their own continued professional development and the Deputy is able to manage in her absence. The Head of Care and Deputy have spent much of their time over the last year working directly alongside the care team on a very practical level. This has been wholly appropriate and necessary, given the historic difficulties that have now greatly improved. The school recognises this action has had a negative impact upon overall monitoring; however, now that pupils are much more settled and the boarding team is cohesive, with all members now through their induction period, plans are in place for the Head of Care to spend more of her time focusing upon monitoring and administrative tasks. The school's standard 33 visitor continues to conduct rigorous monthly inspections, which identify areas requiring improvement. His feedback is positively received, with appropriate remedial action taken. He has recently delivered training for the teaching and boarding teams, focusing upon joint working. General school records are being maintained, but there are some gaps within complaint's investigations and daily recording sheets. The Head Teacher recognises this shortfall; hence, the plans for the Head of Care to spend less of her time in a 'hands on' role. The board of governors are supportive and keenly interested in the boarding provision. An Every Child Matters (ECM) committee has been operating for the past 18 months and the governor who chairs this forum conducts visits to the school and boarding areas. He occasionally participates in school assemblies and recently joined the boarders on an external activity. The board consists of a good mix of professionals, including a fire officer and accountant; specific effort is currently focusing upon the recruitment of parent governors.

What must be done to secure future improvement?

Statutory requirements

This section sets out the actions, which must be taken so that the registered person meets the Care Standards Act 2000, and the National Minimum Standards. The Registered Provider must comply with the given timescales.

Standard	Action	Due date
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Recommendations

To improve the quality and standards of care further the registered person should take account of the following recommendation(s):

- conduct a thorough review of the complaint's procedures, processes and records to ensure a robust approach is being implemented. Consider the value of providing refresher training to all staff on the handling and recording of complaints (NMS 4).
- introduce clear and effective monitoring systems of all instances of bullying, which explore patterns and trends and can therefore reliably inform risk assessments (NMS 6).
- ensure all related fire records and subsequent risk assessments are held together, with clear evidence of robust monitoring (NMS 26).
- review the current methods of collating health and safety information and data and consider providing the site manager with additional administrative support (NMS 26).

- ensure a new appointment for Legionella testing is confirmed and follow up the previous recommendation with regards wooden panelling in boarders' bedrooms. Consider the value of conducting periodic manual checking of hot water temperatures as an added safeguard to thermostatic controls (NMS 26).
- ensure the recruitment policy and procedure is adhered to in all cases, with particular reference towards the receipt of CRB certificates before an employee commences and recording in writing the outcome of the telephone verification of written references. Consider the value of providing training on equal opportunities / diversity for all those involved with staff recruitment (NMS 27).
- consider the value of providing clear and focused forums for teaching and boarding teams to internally review boarders' care plans as a joint venture (NMS 17).
- ensure the boarding accommodation is refurbished and updated in order to fully meet the prescribed National Minimum Standards (NMS 23,24,25).
- ensure all of the areas described within this standard are subject to robust monitoring systems (NMS 32).
- conduct a review as to the content and quality of written records, including complaints, incidents, sanctions and letters to parents, to address the current variances and consider providing training in record writing and keeping (NMS 19).
- carefully consider the impact that lessening the direct involvement of the Head of Care and Deputy within boarding activities will have and make provision for this impact by increasing current staffing levels (NMS 30).

Annex

Annex A

National Minimum Standards for residential special school

Being healthy

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- children live in a healthy environment and the health and intimate care needs of each child are identified and promoted (NMS 14)
- children are provided with healthy, nutritious meals that meet their dietary needs (NMS 15)

Ofsted considers 14 the key standard to be inspected.

Staying safe

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- children's privacy is respected and information about them is confidentially handled (NMS 3)
- children's complaints are addressed without delay and children are kept informed of progress in their consideration (NMS 4)
- the welfare of children is promoted, children are protected from abuse, and an appropriate response is made to any allegation or suspicion of abuse (NMS 5)
- children are protected from bullying (NMS 6)
- all significant events relating to the protection of children in the school are notified to the appropriate authorities by the head of the school or designated person (NMS 7)
- children who are absent without authority are protected in accordance with written guidance and responded to positively on return (NMS 8)
- children are assisted to develop appropriate behaviour through the encouragement of acceptable behaviour and constructive staff responses to inappropriate behaviour (NMS 10)
- children live in schools that provide physical safety and security (NMS 26)
- there is careful selection and vetting of all staff and volunteers, and monitoring of visitors to the school to prevent children being exposed to potential abusers (NMS 27)

Ofsted considers 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 10, 26 and 27 the key standards to be inspected.

Enjoying and achieving

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- the school's residential provision actively supports children's educational progress at the school (NMS 12)
- children have ample opportunity to engage in purposeful and enjoyable activities within the school and in the local community (NMS 13)
- children receive individual support when they need it (NMS 22)

Ofsted considers 12 and 22 the key standards to be inspected.

Making a positive contribution

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- children are encouraged and supported to make decisions about their lives and to influence the way the school is run; no child should be assumed to be unable to communicate their views (NMS 2)
- children have sound relationships with staff based on honesty and mutual respect (NMS 9)
- children experience planned and sensitively handled admission and leaving processes (NMS 11)

- children have their needs assessed and written plans outline how these needs will be met while at school (NMS 17)
- in accordance with their wishes children are able and encouraged to maintain contact with their parents and families while at school (NMS 20)

Ofsted considers 2, 17 and 20 the key standards to be inspected.

Achieving economic well-being

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- children can wear their own clothing outside school time, can secure personal requisites and stationery while at school, and are helped to look after their own money (NMS 16)
- children about to leave care are prepared for the transition into independent living (NMS 21)
- children live in well designed and pleasant premises, which provide sufficient space and facilities to meet their needs
- children live in accommodation which is appropriately decorated, furnished and maintained to a high standard, providing adequate facilities for their use (NMS 24)
- children are able to carry out their personal care in privacy and with dignity (NMS 25)

Ofsted considers the key standard to be inspected.

Organisation

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- children, parents, staff and placing authorities have access to a clear statement of the school's care principles and practice for boarding pupils (NMS 1)
- children's needs, development and progress are recorded to reflect their individuality and their group interactions (NMS 18)
- there are adequate records of the staff and child groups of the school (NMS 19)
- children are looked after by staff who understand their needs and are able to meet them consistently (NMS 28)
- children are looked after by staff who are trained to meet their needs (NMS 29)
- children are looked after by staff who are themselves supported and guided in safeguarding and promoting the children's welfare (NMS 30)
- children receive the care and services they need from competent staff (NMS 31)
- children and staff enjoy the stability of efficiently run schools (NMS 32)
- the governing body, trustees, local authority, proprietor or other responsible body monitors the welfare of the children in the school (NMS 33)

Ofsted considers 1, 28, 31 and 32 the key standards to be inspected.