

St Nicholas Special School

Inspection report for residential special school

Unique reference number	SC013882
Inspection date	24 September 2008
Inspector	Lucy Ansell / Sophie Wood
Type of Inspection	Key

Address	St. Nicholas School School Taynton Drive Merstham REDHILL RH1 3PU
Telephone number	01737 215488
Email	admin@st-nicholas-merstham.surrey.sch.uk
Registered person	Surrey County Council
Head of care	Craig Anderson
Head / Principal	
Date of last inspection	13 March 2008

© 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.

You can obtain copies of The Children Act 2004, Every Child Matters and The National Minimum Standards for Children's Services from: The Stationery Office (TSO) PO Box 29, St Cripins, Duke Street, Norwich, NR3 1GN. Tel: 0870 600 5522. Online ordering: www.tso.co.uk/bookshop

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 was an announced inspection carried out over two days by two inspectors. The school meets most of the key National Minimum Standards and is exceeding in some of them. Those with shortfalls are concerned with the physical premises. All outcome groups were inspected. This inspection was scheduled six months after the previous visit due to the concerns arising from the shortfalls identified within the physical environment. The other previous recommendations made were also followed up. Overall it was very satisfactory to note that even though the school has had a much shorter time frame between inspections, all of the recommendations had been addressed, albeit some require continued development. Although the overall structure of the boarding provision remains inadequate it was clear that the staff had made huge efforts to ensure the facilities, although not ideal, are homely and comfortable. This along with a guarantee of funds from Surrey County Council and the submission of building plans means this outcome group can now be assessed as satisfactory. The school continues to move forward and develop and has many outstanding elements. The school's overall management structure and the strong relationships that exist within the school contribute effectively to the protection and promotion of pupils' welfare.

The overall quality rating is good.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

In a very short space of time since the last inspection, the school has demonstrated a clear desire to implement the recommendations and has made some excellent progress. The complaints procedure remains under review and the monitoring systems in respect of bullying have been updated. These now provide better safeguards. Much work has been completed to improve upon administrative systems and records in respect of fire safety and other general health and safety topics. The process for Legionella testing has commenced and random manual water temperature checks are now being conducted. The majority of wooden panelling has been removed and the rest is planned for the near future. A clearer coordinated approach to care planning between the teaching and boarding teams is having the desired positive impact, thus benefiting the boys in terms of maintaining a consistent approach. Robust monitoring systems have been implemented and although this aspect remains in its infancy, these new processes are already having a positive impact. The general standard of written records has improved and these are being more closely monitored with the introduction of the new monitoring systems.

Staffing levels remain under constant review and a new care appointment has been made. The boarding element is sufficiently staffed to meet the needs of the boys. Whilst clear attempts have been made to continue to improve upon the aesthetics of the boarding accommodation, including some redecoration and new floors within the kitchens, overall, the boarding accommodation still has shortfalls. The recommendation regarding the evidencing of telephoning referees remains has not been fully implemented.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

There is good provision at the school for identifying and addressing the routine health needs of boarding pupils, health plans are comprehensive and up to date. There are clear procedures for the management and administration of medication and those concerning the handover of medication upon admission are being revised. The implementation of medication procedures is consistent with good practice. Most records are being appropriately maintained. Qualified first aid staff are always available on site. The added benefit of the external support from a Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) worker and two social workers and a Speech and language therapist coming in to the school on a weekly basis is immeasurable. The school provides a cooked lunch but breakfast and evening meals are now fully prepared and cooked on the boarding units. The school has just received the Healthy Schools Award. The units plan and shop for the meals with the boarders and they are encouraged to participate in the cooking. The boys and their parents have ongoing opportunities to discuss preferences in relation to food. Staff ensure that healthy and nutritious meals are provided and offer suitable assistance to ensure the boys eat a balanced diet. The boys are provided with fruit and healthy snacks and have a tuck shop twice a week; this is closely monitored to avoid the purchase of too many sweets and chocolate. Staff who handle food have completed training in food hygiene. The boys all state the food is very good and they are able to make choices.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

The accommodation offers satisfactory levels of privacy for those boarders staying in single bedrooms with en-suite facilities and enough communal space. However, a small number of shared rooms compromise privacy for those groups and the shower blocks are inadequate. Records are securely stored and information is sensitively shared. The boys say they trust the staff and can talk openly with them. They also know that some information may have to be passed on. At this time there have been no new complaints received and complaints information for boarders is appropriately displayed around the site. The boys confirm that whilst some incidents of bullying do occur, they feel safe and confident in the processes in place to manage such occurrences. This is further demonstrated through the school having a dedicated lead on bullying, who robustly monitors all incidents. Staff have received appropriate child protection training and are suitably aware of the relevant reporting procedures. Boarders say they feel well looked after and they enjoy positive relationships with all of the care team. Communication between staff working across both aspects of the school is good and contributes effectively to the welfare of pupils and to the overall standard of pupils' behaviour at the school being very good. There are low levels of the use of physical restraint and sanctions within the boarding environment and positive praise and reward schemes work well. The boys state 'The staff are strict here but they need to be with us, we like that we have clear rules. The sticker charts are new and we all like the system of earning a good trip out, positive praise three times a day is

really good to hear.' The school has introduced an extended day for day pupils who can attend boarding provision until six o'clock to attend activities and this is proving very popular. Much improved systems and processes are now in place with regards monitoring all health and safety aspects. Separate files for fire, risk assessments, the swimming pool, grounds checks and routine maintenance needs greatly assist the site manager administratively. Monthly health and safety meetings are now in place and these are attended by senior personnel. The site manager continues to conduct termly premises risk assessments along with one of the school governors, who is also a fire officer. A detailed report is produced as a consequence, identifying works needed. Robust recruitment procedures include careful selection and appropriate vetting processes. However, the follow up phone call on written references is still not being clearly evidenced.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

Boarding pupils receive excellent levels of support from teaching and boarding teams. Improved lines of communication ensure consistency and this delivers a seamless service. Both teams understand each others' care plans and targets; these are agreed jointly, with input from individual pupils. Such joined up working significantly impacts upon the chances for success and this further enhances feelings of achievement and self esteem for the boys. Care staff positively encourage the boys to complete their homework. Facilities within the boarding provision include a quiet area, fully equipped computer suite and library. An increased number of teaching staff now provide additional support within the boarding provision, not just for homework clubs and activities, but for social and leisure events as well. Excellent links continue to exist with external professional agencies including CAMHS and speech and language therapy. This is further enhanced through sessions and meetings being held on the school site, causing minimal disruption to a pupil's school day. The two partnership social workers are also based at the school for a number of days each week and they maintain excellent links with parents and school staff, again offering a consistent approach. The school has actively introduced the extended day programme this term for all boys wishing to participate, who do not ordinarily board. There are plans for this to extend to all of those on the school roll. This is already proving to be very popular and the boys say they are able to undertake activities they may not have the opportunity to try otherwise. The school remains keen to be positively viewed by the local community and has developed a number of initiatives to promote this. Its sports pitches are open to public groups during the evenings and weekends and the plans for a BMX track will include inviting members of the local community to use it. Local facilities including the cinema, water sports, cycling, visits to parks and leisure centres are routinely accessed and the school now has a new minibus, which is very well used. Within the boarding provision boys have access to extensive grounds, an outdoor swimming pool, sports hall and outdoor play equipment. Indoor provision includes the computer suite, television, an abundance of board games and various games consoles.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

Boarders have a strong voice with regards the day-to-day operation of the school. They believe their views and opinions really matter and say they are effectively listened to. Forums include an active student council and each boarding area holds weekly meetings, whereby boarders and care staff plan activities and discuss school issues. The school actively promotes inclusion

with lots of activities so children can choose what is right for them and some recently assisted with staff recruitment. The overall standard of pupils' behaviour at the school is excellent. Sound admission processes include clear input from partnership social workers, who conduct home visits prior to pupils joining the school. They liaise effectively with parents and conduct most of the assessment process of prospective newcomers. Each boarder has a designated key worker who liaises between the school, family and, if required external agencies. The boys each have a list of three trusted staff members they can go to but the boys state 'it would be rare they would not go to any member of care staff.' Staff are very knowledgeable about the care needs of the boys, the care plans reflect this and hold comprehensive up to date information. The boarding team focus very much upon social skills within their care planning and target setting process. Targets are set in consultation with the boys and care is taken to ensure they are achievable. Targets are reviewed every end / beginning of term. Regular ongoing contact with parents is maintained using written reports and telephone calls. Key workers call them each week to provide general feedback on progress.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is satisfactory.

The boarding accommodation is within the main school building and although a self contained unit, it looks and feels like converted classrooms. The accommodation offers boarders a mix of single and shared bedrooms with bathing facilities nearby. The main area enjoys the comfort of a pleasantly furnished, well-maintained communal area. The annexe (for senior boys) benefits from a large games area and a smaller lounge, furnished to make more of a home cinema feel. Computers with internet access are available within the boarding accommodation and boarders are able to access the schools sports fields and spacious grounds, sports hall and outdoor swimming pool after the school day. The shower blocks are inadequate and offer no level of privacy as all are grouped together, do not lock and the boys have to come out to get changed. Staff do their best to supervise this area in an attempt to ensure a greater level of privacy at this time. The toilets and shower block have been recently redecorated by the care staff, and new towels and furnishings have been purchased, which the boys say makes it feel more homely.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

Clear written policies and procedures underpin the school's practice and there is good information provided for boarders and their parents. Boys confirm their understanding of key areas such as complaints, bullying and behavioural expectations. The introductory pack for the boys is written in a child friendly manner using pictorial signs and is clear and easy for the boys to read. Care files and daily notes are clear and easy to follow. The boys understand they can read these and make entries if they wish. Staff follow prescribed care plan guidance in practice and improved monitoring systems regularly review this information. The care team is cohesive, stable and well led. An additional team member has joined since the last inspection. This factor enables the Head of Care and Deputy to give sufficient focus to their administrative and monitoring roles. The staffing levels of the boarding provision are under constant review, in light of the continuing increasing demand for boarding and extended day placements. The induction and probationary processes have improved even further. These are very well documented and ensure new staff are confident and competent to undertake their roles effectively and safely. All statutory training courses for staff are up to date. The school routinely uses INSET days for whole school topics, as well as sometimes splitting these days to focus

upon the different types of subjects required by teachers and care staff. The school positively benefits from being led by a dynamic and innovative principal, who in turn, is effectively supported by a motivated and experienced senior management team. In addition, an active governing body is committed to improving the service and raising standards. Through diligent planning, the targets originally set are coming to fruition, yet the plans for future improvements continue, with the school continuing to aspire to become an outstanding provision. Much recent work has focused upon further developing overall monitoring systems. Key staff members, including a number of governors, are more clearly accountable for specific areas and are collating monitoring information in a much improved format. The council also continues to supply a Standard 33 visitor, who conducts termly visits, resulting in a written report and she provides additional valuable support and guidance to the Head of Care. All of these factors effectively contribute to a sound and robust monitoring process, which positively impacts upon all of the pupils.

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
----------	--------	----------

Recommendations

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

- ensure the recruitment policy and procedure is adhered to in all cases, with particular reference towards writing the outcome of the telephone verification of written references (NMS 26)
- ensure the revision of the admission of medication policy (NMS 14)
- ensure the physical surroundings for the boarders are adequate to meet their needs (NMS 24)
- ensure the showers and toilet facilities meet the needs of the boarders in ensuring their privacy (NMS 25)

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.