

# St Nicholas Special School

Inspection report for Residential Special School

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<b>Setting address</b>	St. Nicholas School, Taynton Drive, Merstham, Redhill, Surrey, RH1 3PU
<b>Telephone number</b>	01737 215488
<b>Email</b>	head@st-nicholas-merstham.surrey.sch.uk
<b>Registered person</b>	London Borough of Sutton Play Service
<b>Head/ Principal</b>	
<b>Nominated person</b>	Craig Anderson
<b>Date of last inspection</b>	15/09/2009

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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 outcomes for children set out in the Children Act 2004 and the relevant National Minimum Standards for the service.

## 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 and 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. 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**

The overall quality rating is good.

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

This short notice, key inspection covered all of the key standards and explored the five recommendations made from the previous visit. Four of these have been fully implemented to good effect and all are explained within the main body of this report.

The school strives to make improvements and pupils are thriving as a direct result. The school provides a good service, with a number of outstanding features.

The boarding accommodation has very recently re-opened, following major refurbishment. The physical provision is now of such outstanding quality for this particular pupil group, that it is an example of optimum quality for similar schools.

Staff are led by an innovative headteacher and inspiring head of care. Communication within the school and to external agencies is a particular strength. Pupils receive excellent individual care packages as a direct result, albeit that external services are sometimes delayed, beyond the school's control.

Staff members across school and boarding teams liaise effectively and respect each others' roles. Collaborative working has a positive impact with regards to outcomes for pupils.

Three recommendations have been made from this visit and these are concerned with health promotion, one aspect of recruitment practice and the monitoring systems currently implemented by the governing body.

## **Improvements since the last inspection**

Five recommendations were made at the previous inspection of 15 September 2009 and all but one of these has been successfully implemented, resulting in improved outcomes for the pupils.

Health care plans have been extensively reviewed. Information with regards to all treatments and key working sessions provide clearer information; thus, improved safeguards are in place.

Pupils report better consultation processes with the catering team. The provision and the quality of meals throughout the day and evening receives excellent feedback from pupils alongside providing a healthy and balanced diet.

Personnel files generally hold the information needed to ensure that robust recruitment processes are being implemented. One example containing omissions is described within the main body of this report and a further recommendation has been made.

Care plans have been extensively reviewed and amended. Although in their infancy, the contents of those seen demonstrates clear consultation and input from the pupils, as was recommended. Hence, pupils feel a real sense of ownership with regards to their own individual care plans and are more likely to engage with the interventions described.

Recent refurbishment works have resulted in a physical boarding provision which is now of such a high standard that it could be used of an example of excellence to other schools. Pupils elect to reside here as often as possible because they fully appreciate the services and accommodation now on offer.

## **Helping children to be healthy**

The provision is good.

Robust health and medical protocols are implemented in practice. This factor ensures that the health and medical needs of pupils are known and actively promoted by the residential team. Pupils receive the care and support they need. Excellent communication with parents and relevant external agencies ensures that pupils receive a seamless, coordinated approach.

Separate, dedicated health files contain clear and explicit information. This includes known medical conditions, allergies, current involvement with health professionals and consent for treatment from parents. The quality of such documentation could not be fully assessed because it has only been very recently introduced; however, the format looks to be comprehensive and clear. External referrals are made, where necessary and staff receive appropriate training, such as first aid, medication administration and food hygiene.

Pupils enjoy the privacy of a well equipped medical room and separate sick bay, with additional private toilet and showering facilities. Medical records and equipment is secure and current administration records show no errors.

The residential team coordinates evening meal provision with the school catering team. Pupils appreciate that this factor prevents menus from being repeated and they enjoy good variety and choice. Great emphasis is placed upon the pupils assisting with evening meal provision. Two fully equipped, new kitchens provide the space and facilities they need to maximise their independence. Timetables are currently being devised in order for teams of pupils to take turns in shopping for and preparing the evening meals for each other.

Preferences, allergies and special diets are known and additional helpings support the comments received from pupils, such as, 'you are never hungry' and 'the food is great'. Mealtimes are observed to be relaxed and sociable. Good manners are encouraged by excellent role modelling. Pupils are able to purchase an appropriate amount of sweets and treats, but the additional use of this within the incentive programme presents the risk of unhealthy foods being overly associated with positive rewards.

### **Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe**

The provision is good.

Staff implement clear procedural guidance with regards to privacy and confidentiality. Written information is securely stored and staff do not discuss sensitive issues outside of confidential offices. Pupils appreciate that information about them is only shared with those needing to know. The physical layout of the accommodation further promotes good privacy; pupils can choose to be in groups with their friends, or alone when needing personal space. They confirm that staff always knock on bedroom and bathroom doors before requesting entry. Discreet monitoring of the boarding computer room promotes privacy for pupils alongside effective safeguarding at the same time.

Pupils are fully conversant with formal complaints procedures. These are advertised throughout the school. Concerns and complaints forms are placed discreetly, in order for pupils to have ready anonymous access. Pupils say, 'I just tell a member of staff if something is bothering me' and 'you can put your thoughts in the boxes if you want, no-one would see you doing it'. Hence, the school encourages and invites complaints and concerns in the spirit of resolving them. Formal complaints from pupils and other parties are rare. Written records are clear and withstand close scrutiny; they are also monitored by the governing body and external Standard 33 visitor.

Solid safeguarding procedures effectively promote the welfare of all pupils. Lines of responsibility and accountability are clear, all staff receive ongoing updated training and links with the local safeguarding board are being maintained. A partnership social worker is based at the school and this link provides a vital, enabling role which

provides additional safeguards. Senior staff receive training in safer recruitment and the Head of Care retains a child protection lead, which is well known to the entire staff team.

Pupils say that bullying incidents do occur and this statement is further endorsed by the whole school staff team. Pro active measures significantly reduce such incidents and swift, authoritative actions are implemented in response to such occurrences. An educative approach is in place, which includes special assemblies and project work. Pupils are also encouraged to use the discreet processes throughout the school to advise staff if they are worried about bullying incidents concerning their peers.

The school works collaboratively and in partnership with associated external agencies. Referrals and consultations are routinely made to the local authority safeguarding team and child mental health services, in the best interests of the pupils. Notifications to Ofsted are being received appropriately and in a timely manner.

Attendance figures are very good and there have been no unauthorised absences from the residential provision for a number of years. Clear protocols are understood by the staff in the event that this may happen. Pupils say, 'why would you not want to stay here, it's brilliant!'

Staff work tirelessly to reward positive conduct. Pupils are able to accurately describe the reward systems in place. They fully understand the ethos of the school and its code of conduct. Reward systems are plentiful and pupils are actively encouraged to see the best in themselves and strive for positive achievement. Individual behaviour management plans accurately describe specific difficulties and the approved interventions which are in place to manage these. Staff receive appropriate guidance and external training with regards to the use of sanctions and approved physical restraint techniques. Written records are clear. Such logs demonstrate minimal use and these are closely monitored by the Head of Care and Standard 33 visitor.

Pupils benefit from staying in safe and secure accommodation. The premises are suitably protected because of good security measures. Generic risk assessments minimise potential hazards and allows pupils to enjoy school facilities during boarding time; for example, the extensive grounds, ball courts and the swimming pool. The on-site estates manager receives the training necessary to remain fully conversant and competent with health and safety issues, as is the ancillary staff team. Fire safety precautions are currently being updated, due to the very recent refurbishments of the boarding accommodation. Pupils understand and practise evacuation procedures. Regular checks with regards to site safety, including water temperatures, electrical and gas equipment and school vehicles all serve to provide pupils with robust protection safeguards.

Potential staff members are subject to robust recruitment procedures. Pupils are protected. New boarding staff members do not commence with their duties until all of the required checks are satisfactorily completed and visitors to the school are appropriately supervised. Whole school personnel files are variable in terms of

quality; some gaps are noted in one file. There is no clear monitoring system in place regarding these. Hence, there is a risk that shortfalls may go undetected.

## **Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do**

The provision is outstanding.

Excellent liaison systems between all departments results in an outstanding multi-disciplinary approach. Pupils receive consistent practices as a direct result. Teaching and residential teams work collaboratively in terms of setting and monitoring residential and educational targets and goals. These are meaningful and appropriate. Pupils are enabled to make appropriate choices in terms of the vocational and academic curriculum offered by the school. Residential staff members are commended by their teaching colleagues in terms of the additional support and guidance they provide in this regard.

Key staff members ensure the school and its pupils actively participate in local events. Hence, the school is viewed very positively by the local community. The Community Cohesion Coordinator is dynamic and creative. Pupils have recently been involved in local Christmas celebrations, practically assisting the older persons community and working directly with The Salvation Army. The school welcomes local community groups to utilise its facilities and is currently actively involved in fund raising for Comic Relief. Pupils are developing a real and tangible social conscience, which is being further developed and encouraged by the school's growing links with similar schools around the world through internet and email contact.

Pupils thrive because they receive the services they need. Staff throughout the school hold explicitly clear additional responsibilities from behaviour management to monitoring records and safeguarding concerns. They share pertinent information sensitively within the whole staff group and make swift referrals to appropriate external agencies. Pupils readily receive individually tailored care packages as a direct result. The nurture group is providing an outstanding service for new Year 7 pupils; vital work concerned with educational and emotional needs is supporting pupils to make great progress.

## **Helping children make a positive contribution**

The provision is good.

Pupils confirm that their views and opinions are actively sought by the school. A variety of forums, including the student council, boarding meetings and key worker sessions effectively promote consultation. Pupils have a strong voice. Changes occur as a direct result and pupils feel empowered. They say, 'as long as it's not a daft idea, you really get listened to' and 'we chose a lot of the decoration for the new boarding build and we always choose the activities that are on offer'.

Pupils enjoy excellent relationships with staff members across the school. They are very positive about selecting their own 'trusted adults list'. Key staff members are



available to support individuals during the day and evening when they experience particular difficulties. The school recognises the importance for pupils to establish appropriate and trusting relationships in order for the continued development of their emotional health.

Pupils join the school based upon thorough assessment processes. Parents report very positively about home visits and the inclusive style of the school. The option to board is introduced gradually; pupils often explore this provision through the extended day programme and subsequently request an initial stay to decide if they like it. The care plan format used in boarding has been reviewed and extensively updated. Although it is difficult to fully assess the impact of this system, due to its infancy, the format is comprehensive and is clearly being completed with direct input from the pupils.

Effective provision ensures that pupils are able to contact their families while staying at school. Every pupil has a school email account and computers are readily available. The majority of pupils have their own mobile telephones; the physical location of a payphone ensures good privacy and pupils confirm they are readily able to use office telephones to make important calls. Key workers ensure that they also make weekly contact with parents and carers to ensure excellent liaison and communication.

## **Achieving economic wellbeing**

The provision is outstanding.

Pupils are observed to rush to get to the boarding provision at the end of the school day. They quickly change into their own clothing and are warmly greeted by the care team. Excellent provision ensures they can obtain the items they need; facilities for the completion of homework are superb. Staff remain very sensitive with regards to the economic backgrounds of some of the pupils; hence clear and discreet reward systems ensure that no pupil is disadvantaged because of this. Effective systems protect personal possessions and pupils are appropriately supported to look after their own money.

The school's 'Independent Living Diploma' provides excellent opportunities for pupils to obtain real and appropriate skills to equip them for independent living. Targets and opportunities are realistic; they run seamlessly through school and boarding provision, hence the chances of success are maximised. All of the staff involved work incredibly hard to avoid simulated activities; work experience placements, independent travel and cookery are all conducted in very real settings. Pupils are able to make mistakes and be disappointed, thus maximising their abilities to develop appropriate coping strategies for adult life. Consultation systems with leavers are being developed in order for the school to critically analyse its effectiveness, by way of striving to achieve continuing improved practice.

The boarding accommodation has very recently re-opened, following months' of major refurbishment. The care team members are commended for their involvement

in this process. Their contribution to the design and facilities has ensured the physical environment ideally provides for the needs of the pupils.

Every aspect of this provision is of the utmost quality; furniture and equipment is of an exceptionally high standard. Pupils refer to the 'wow factor' with regards to their separate cinema, play station, computer and arts and crafts rooms. The communal area, equipped with comfortable seating, television and dining space is warmly decorated. Pupils are very inquisitive with regards to the 'mood lighting' system here; they also enjoy frequent use of the pool and air hockey table situated at the end of this area.

Bedrooms are situated across three separate corridors. Every pupil has their own allocated room; the number of bathrooms and toilets close by ensures minimal sharing and excellent privacy. Three double rooms are available for those wishing to share and disabled provision and access is assured. The quality of the furniture and equipment in these areas is outstanding and pupils are being encouraged to bring in their own possessions in order to personalise these areas.

Two fully equipped kitchens provide excellent opportunities for pupils to assist the staff team with evening meal provision. Equipment is of excellent quality and appropriate health and safety checks are being routinely implemented.

Almost every door within this provision is fitted with a lock, and although not always used, this presents a potentially constrained ambience. The school is aware of this and is systematically removing those deemed to be unnecessary.

## **Organisation**

The organisation is good.

Following the recent developments to the boarding provision, related documentation has been thoroughly reviewed and re-written. All potential stakeholders have received updated guidance, which provides a very clear and accurate description of the service. Different formats, including an excellent DVD, ensures that parents, pupils and placing authorities receive the information they need. Spaces within the boarding provision are being taken up very quickly.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. Related policies and procedures are clear and explicit; they are implemented in practice. Ethnic and cultural diversity within the pupil population is reflected through the composition of the whole school staff team. Much emphasis is placed upon challenging and educating pupils with regards to stereotypical views about sex, race and religion. Pupils with very specific and individual needs are not disadvantaged. Differences are explored and celebrated through assemblies, project work and food.

The boarding team is dynamic and energetic. Lines of responsibility and accountability are explicitly clear. Leadership is a particular strength. The team is cohesive and a coordinated approach is delivered because of excellent

communication and mutual respect between team members.

Care staff receive the guidance, training and support they need to provide a nurturing and enabling service for the pupils. This starts with a thorough induction and probationary period when they first join the school. Mandatory training is expedited early on; this includes core subjects focusing on health and safety and safeguarding matters. Different staffing disciplines throughout the school receive the ongoing training they need to effectively deliver the services associated with their own roles and responsibilities; hence the entire care team has either finished, or is completing National Vocational Qualification training at the appropriate levels.

Staff members commend the regularity and quality of the supervision that they receive by their immediate line managers. Such meetings are used to review and measure the quality of their care practice and to identify additional training needs. Staff members say, 'I've never been refused a training request' and 'I am encouraged to ask for the additional training I think I need to perform my role better'. Annual appraisal systems further explore such needs, the findings of which are carried over into subsequent and ongoing supervision meetings.

Now that core training needs are essentially being met, the school is focusing upon additional and service-enhancing courses for the staff team, in an attempt to provide individuals with additional skills to further benefit the pupils. The school is fully aware that much of its practice is steeped within behavioural management expertise and it is keen to counter this with training concerned with a nurturing theme, such as 'attachment theory'. The Standard 33 visitor is particularly keen to see this aspect further developed.

Some staff have already benefitted from such training, and the practice observed clearly reflects this. Pupils are highly valued and they clearly benefit from a warm and nurturing approach.

Monitoring systems are sound. The Standard 33 visitor produces clear and where appropriate, critical reports with regards to the boarding provision. The Head of Care welcomes such a vigorous approach, in the spirit of continuing to improve the services offered. The governing body has undergone some recent changes and operates very stringent financial committees and procedures, which provide added value. However, its emphasis upon welfare and boarding monitoring is less robust and this omission presents the risk of this group receiving inaccurate information, thus impeding continued progress and improvement.

## **What must be done to secure future improvement?**

### **Compliance with national minimum standards**

The school meets all the national minimum standards, with the exception of any listed below. To ensure that the school meets the national minimum standards the school needs to...

- review the current reward systems which effectively promote unhealthy foods and drinks (NMS 14)
- ensure that all required checks and references are completed for every staff member who may come into contact with the boarding provision (NMS 27)
- ensure that all of the areas monitored by the governing body receive the same stringent approach. (NMS 33)