

# St Nicholas Special School

Welfare inspection report for a residential special school

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<b>Unique reference number for education</b>	125457
<b>Inspection dates</b>	15/09/2011
<b>Inspector</b>	Sophie Wood

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## **Purpose and scope of the inspection**

This inspection was carried out under the Children Act 1989, as amended by the Care Standards Act 2000, having regard to the national minimum standards for residential special schools, in order to assure children and young people, parents, the public, local authorities and government of the quality and standard of the service provided.<sup>1,2</sup>

## **Information about the school**

St Nicholas School is a residential special school, providing day and residential 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 residential provision is situated within a separate area of the main school building. Age groups are appropriately separated and residential pupils stay in their own allocated bedrooms. Residential pupils can stay at the school from between one and four nights each week; all pupils go home at weekends and the school also offers an extended programme. The boarding facility offers two double bedrooms, in the event of boys wishing to share and it is also fully accessible to those who may have a physical disability.

The residential provision was last inspected in March 2011.

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<sup>1</sup> [www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1989/41/contents](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1989/41/contents).

<sup>2</sup> [www.education.gov.uk/schools/leadership/typesofschools/a00192112/boarding-schools](http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/leadership/typesofschools/a00192112/boarding-schools).

## Inspection judgements

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>outstanding</b>
Outcomes for residential pupils	outstanding
Quality of residential provision and care	outstanding
Residential pupils' safety	outstanding
Leadership and management of the residential provision	outstanding

## Overall effectiveness

The key findings of the residential inspection are as follows.

- The overall effectiveness of St Nicholas School is outstanding. Strong, effective and sustained leadership results in excellent outcomes for residential pupils.
- The school meets the national minimum standards and has met the recommendations made at the last inspection.
- Residential pupils are protected from harm because of robust and effective safeguarding practices.
- Residential pupils are cared for by an experienced, long serving and well trained staff team which is effectively trained and supported.
- Residential pupils thrive in a safe, nurturing environment. They enjoy positive and respectful relationships with staff members who make them feel valued.
- Excellent communication systems with external professionals and parents and carers results in collaborative joint working. This impacts positively upon the pupils and ensures consistency.
- Residential pupils learn to develop improved coping strategies and to make safer choices.
- The health, medical and dietary needs of residential pupils are well known and effectively provided for.
- The promotion of equality is well understood and practiced within the residential provision.
- The person responsible for conducting staff recruitment checks, in respect of volunteers, for the residential provision is not clearly identified. This does not

significantly impact upon residential pupils.

## **Outcomes for residential pupils**

Outcomes for residential pupils are outstanding. A nurturing staff team has high expectations and encourages residential pupils to have aspirations and to feel good about themselves. This ethos is embedded throughout the whole school and pupils are achieving beyond their own expectations. An excellent balance is being achieved by the staff team. Residential pupils thrive within an environment which is rich in rewards, while quick to implement behavioural boundaries when this becomes necessary. Residential pupils respond exceptionally well to the clear messages they receive from a staff team they respect. Personal growth and development is occurring emotionally, socially and academically.

Comments from residential pupils include, 'I love this school because of the staff', 'they can be strict if you're messing around' and 'they're just like really good parents.' Carers and parents say, 'this school has been the making of my son' and 'he is happy, settled and doing better than anyone predicted at his old school.'

Residential pupils say they feel very safe when they are at school. They attribute this to the high quality of the premises which are very secure from potential public access and by the actions of the staff team. Incidents of bullying are rare but swiftly managed; staff members are effectively deployed across the whole school site during breaks and evenings and this provides unobtrusive supervision.

Residential pupils enjoy excellent relationships with the staff. Mutual respect is very evident and laughter is common place. Residential pupils present as relaxed and happy. Their residential environment is very busy, packed with a range of activities and staffed by a long-standing competent team. Older pupils are encouraged to be excellent role models and age groups across the range happily mix with each other. Positive behaviour is richly rewarded and staff are not phased by the incidents of challenging behaviour which sometimes occur. They are very good at recognising flash points and triggers and are quick to diffuse situations because they know the pupils exceptionally well and are pro-active.

Strong consultation processes enable residential pupils to have a very real say in the operation and development of the school. Realistic decisions are made by the school council and the residential pupils have played a key role in the design and décor of the recently refurbished accommodation. Residential pupils say, 'we are always asked for our views' and 'the activity programme is really down to us to choose what we want to do.' Care review minutes show exceptionally good progress in terms of individuals growing in confidence and it is the staff's inclusive, encouraging approach which is largely responsible.

Excellent healthcare provision ensures positive outcomes for residential pupils. They

commend the staff team's approach when they are unwell and the school is explicitly clear about parental responsibility in this regard. External professional health services are readily accessed where necessary; residential pupils receive the help and support they need. The food provided is nutritional, varied and enjoyed by the pupils. Within the residential provision, pupils actively assist with meal preparation and learn to cook independently alongside making healthy choices.

The acquisition of meaningful independence skills is targeted by the residential team from each pupil's first day of entry. Residential pupils assist in planning their own targets which range from budgeting, completing domestic tasks, travelling independently and familiarising themselves with their local surroundings. Excellent liaison with local businesses, the connexions service and representatives of the community provides meaningful work experience placements for older pupils. The school is welcomed by its local community because of such positive links. The staff team is very skilled at tailoring such programmes to suit individual needs. Hence, residential pupils are appropriately pushed although not overwhelmed and progress, however small, receives high praise.

## **Quality of residential provision and care**

The quality of the care received by residential pupils is outstanding. An established, competent care team is effectively led, very well trained and cohesive. The residential provision is held in very high regard by teaching colleagues and the governing body. Staff from all disciplines work within the teaching and residential departments to provide a seamless and holistic approach. Residential pupils say they really enjoy spending time with teachers, including the Principal outside of the school day. They also derive comfort and safety when their key workers provide additional classroom support when this is needed. Information about individual pupils, no matter how seemingly insignificant, is shared between those needing to know very swiftly; collaborative working in the pupil's best interests is a particular strength of the school.

The presenting needs of prospective pupils are very carefully assessed prior to a place being offered. This process actively involves key personnel from teaching and boarding, the prospective pupil, parents and carers and the partnership social worker from the local authority. The latter provision is currently under review and will be keenly missed by the school. Additional personnel contribute to this process, where necessary and this includes the current or previous school and relevant health professionals. Detailed, specific care plans are formalised as a direct result and the examples seen are filled with input from the pupils themselves. These meaningful working documents capture the very essence of each unique individual and offer explicitly clear guidance to the staff.

Residential pupils receive an excellent service in terms of positively promoting their health and well-being. Health records are very detailed and contain all of the information needed, including immunisation histories, consent for treatment, allergies

and known medical conditions. Staff training in respect of first aid and medication administration remains up to date. Clear, explicit procedures and protocols are being stringently implemented and robustly monitored. The school is explicitly clear that parents and carers retain the responsibility for making and supporting general healthcare appointments; however, emergencies are competently supported by school staff and pupils say they are very well looked after until they are collected. Staff know the residential pupils very well; they are fully aware of any specific health needs and promote self awareness and responsibility, in line with growing up. Excellent opportunities are provided for residential pupils to practise their cookery skills and to make healthy eating choices. Two fully equipped kitchens, stocked with fresh supplies are fully utilised each evening and staff are very good at providing only the support and intervention needed by individual pupils so as to maximise their independence in this area.

The activities programme is commended by the residential pupils and those enjoying the benefits of the extended day programme. The latter arrangement is very effectively used as an additional way of introducing day pupils to the residential provision, for which there is a fast growing waiting list. Within the school, residential pupils enjoy access to the grounds, games equipment and swimming pool. They relish evening games of football and choose activities such as going out to local leisure centres, the cinema and bowling. Within the residential provision, pupils also have access to a separate cinema room, a games room furnished with a play station, computer room, crafts room, quiet comfortable lounge areas and a very popular pool table. Parents say, 'my son says it is better than a hotel, there are so many things to do' and 'he hasn't got time to be bored, there is just so much to do'. Residential pupils say, 'the activities are brilliant' and 'we are very lucky.'

Residential pupils enjoy and value the superb quality of their accommodation which has only recently been refurbished. Many existing pupils were actively involved in its design and say they want to keep it like new. Furnishings and fittings are of an excellent standard; pupils feel they really own their bedrooms because nobody else uses them, even if they are away. They enjoy excellent levels of privacy and take a real pride in personalising their rooms and keeping them tidy. Telephones and computers are situated so as to promote private use alongside ensuring appropriate safeguards, such as restricted access to certain websites and discreet supervision. Residential pupils confirm they can easily contact their friends and relatives while at school. Parents and carers say their sons are usually too busy so they rely upon the excellent levels of communication they enjoy with the staff team.

## **Residential pupils' safety**

The safety and welfare of all of the pupils is of paramount importance to the school. This starts with the security and safety of the premises. The site manager diligently conducts routine health and safety checks across the entire site and an effective maintenance programme ensures repairs and renewals are swift. Residential pupils feel very safe; they are fully conversant with fire safety processes and the condition

of all of the equipment and facilities used by them is of excellent quality.

Staff demonstrate an excellent understanding of safeguarding procedures. All such training remains up-to-date and the school enjoys a pro-active, professional relationship with the local safeguarding board. Staff across all disciplines know how to report safety concerns and to whom. They say, 'we are encouraged to over-report, rather than take a risk with a child's safety or well-being.' Key individuals receive higher levels of child protection training and this includes safer recruitment.

New staff are subject to robust recruitment procedures and this process also applies to volunteers. There is some confusion with regards to the responsibility for the recruitment of volunteers within the residential provision; however all of the appropriate checks are being conducted before such an individual enters the residential facility.

Positive behaviour management is a particular strength of the school. Although staff receive accredited training with regards to physical intervention techniques, these are very rarely used. Residential pupils quickly respond to a pro-active approach which is steeped in rewarding positive conduct. The staff are also very good at teaching residential pupils to develop more appropriate ways to deal with their negative feelings and difficulties. Clear behaviour management plans are meaningful and individually tailored. Thus, residential pupils receive the support and guidance they need. Staff anticipate difficult situations and are very good at de-escalating them. They also place an appropriate amount of responsibility upon individuals to start to manage their own behaviour and to learn to take responsibility for their own actions and to keep themselves safe.

There have been no incidents of residential pupils going missing. Risk assessments with regards to the premises and individuals are of exceptionally good quality and subject to on-going monitoring and review. The governing body takes an active interest in this area and this factor provides additional safeguards.

## **Leadership and management of the residential provision**

The head of boarding plays an active role as a member of the school's senior management team. The residential provision is very highly valued and richly resourced. Staff members throughout the school believe that pupils who are kept safe and nurtured will perform better during the school day and the implementation of this philosophy is delivering excellent results.

The aims of the residential provision are clearly described within the Statement of Purpose. Parents, carers and professionals know precisely what to expect from the service. Information for the pupils is delivered in a variety of ways, including a DVD starring current users. The extended day programme provides excellent opportunities for day pupils to taste the residential provision without feeling pressured. Many say, 'I definitely want to board now.'



The residential staff team is long serving and very well established. Mandatory training courses are routinely refreshed and staff members take full advantage of being encouraged to apply for additional training which further enhances their skills and improves their practice. Staff say, 'I love working here and I know I am valued' and 'the training is excellent, I know I give a better service to the boys year upon year.'

The detailed systems in place for staff induction, supervision and appraisal are established. Such meetings are regular and meaningful. Ongoing development needs are tracked and planned for; this results in staff having an improved knowledge and understanding of the needs of the residential pupils. They understand the unique needs presented by individuals in terms of their backgrounds, cultures and heritage and ensure these are threaded throughout the care planning process.

Communication throughout the school and beyond is a key strength of the service. Staff across all disciplines make full use of formal processes, including structured meetings, email communication and informal discussions to share pertinent information about pupils, while maintaining confidentiality. External professionals receive swift referrals and updates in the best interests of the pupils with whom they are involved. Parents commend the relationships they enjoy with the staff. Comments include, 'they 'phone, write and sometimes even visit' and 'I know exactly what is going on with my son, good and bad.'

Residential pupils, their parents and carers say they fully understand how to use the school's complaints processes. They speak of an open and transparent organisation within which informal resolution is usually effective. Formal complaints are very rare; when they do occur, responses are thorough, appropriate and timely.

The quality of record keeping throughout the residential provision is of an excellent standard. Staff take great pride in this area and encourage residential pupils to view their own care files and to make their own entries. Care plans are live, working documents and lend themselves to providing a very clear and accurate picture of each pupil's life at the school.

## **National minimum standards**

The school meets the national minimum standards for residential special schools.

## **What should the school do to improve further?**

- ensure the person responsible for conducting staff recruitment checks in respect of volunteers for the residential provision is clearly identified (NMS 14.1).

**This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.**



15/09/2011

Dear Residential Pupils

### **Inspection of St Nicholas Special School**

Thank you for your help and input at your school's recent Ofsted inspection. I spoke with a number of you about what it is like to stay overnight at your school and you gave me some really helpful information. I also spoke with members of staff, parents and carers and looked at many documents and records. As you will be aware, I have said in my report that your school is outstanding. This is because you receive excellent care.

Your new accommodation is of excellent quality and you told me you really value this and the privacy it provides. You told me you really enjoy the food and that the very best part of staying at school is the activity provision. You also talk very positively about the staff team. You feel very well cared for and safe while at school.

I have found that the school is very well managed and provides you with the help, care and support that you need.

Yours sincerely,

Sophie Wood