

St Nicholas School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	125457
Local Authority	Surrey
Inspection number	359891
Inspection dates	12–13 October 2010
Reporting inspector	Jon Carter

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Boys
Number of pupils on the school roll	50
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Dan Carey
Headteacher	Craig Anderson
Date of previous school inspection	2 July 2008
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by an additional inspector. The inspector visited 15 lessons and observed 11 staff teaching. Meetings were held with school leaders and staff, a representative from the governing body, two groups of students and a parent. The inspector observed the school's work, and looked at school policies, minutes of governing body meetings, curriculum planning and progress tracking information. Responses to questionnaires from three parents/carers, 23 students and 35 staff were scrutinised.

The inspector reviewed many aspects of the school's work and looked in detail at the following.

- How well the school ensures that all students, including those most disaffected by education, make good progress, reach their potential and are well prepared for their future lives.
- To what extent teachers and other staff make good use of assessment systems and information when planning and delivering lessons, and giving feedback to students about their progress.
- How effectively senior leaders are driving school improvement through their vision for learning, especially in the deployment of support staff.

Information about the school

St Nicholas is a small school for boys who have a statement of special educational needs due to their behavioural, social and emotional difficulties. Most also have difficulties associated with cognition, speech, language and communication. Residential care has been provided in the past; however boarding facilities are not currently open due to substantial rebuilding works. Instead, the school provides an extended day for a majority of students. Since the last inspection, the school has entered into a soft federation with a primary special school in the local area and the headteacher of St Nicholas has taken on the executive leadership of both schools. A higher than average number of students is known to be eligible for free school meals. Most students are of White British heritage. The school holds the Healthy School and Activemark awards.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

St Nicholas is a good school. Students reflect extremely positively on the outstanding quality of care, guidance and support they receive. One student, echoing the views of many, simply stated, 'This school has changed my life.'

Most students join St Nicholas School with low levels of attainment due to the learning difficulties that they experience. Very often they also have a history of disrupted education. They make good, and sometimes outstanding, progress from these low starting points, particularly where teaching is focused and purposeful and they can play an active role in their learning. They enjoy using new skills, knowledge and understanding and gain in confidence as a result of tailor-made programmes to improve their levels of literacy and numeracy. Students develop better social skills and adopt appropriate behaviour and this makes a strong contribution to their learning. However, there are a few students whose prior attainment is closer to that expected for their age group. Some of these students do not make as much progress as their classmates because teachers' use of assessment information does not always ensure that learning tasks are sufficiently challenging.

The particularly positive learning ethos of the school, that has been created and developed over recent years by the headteacher and his staff, has successfully instilled a sense of purpose in the students, many of whom were previously disaffected with education. They now have goals for the future which are realistic and achievable because of the skills they are taught and the excellent support they receive. Relationships between staff and students are warm and robust and this, together with the security of rules and routines, contributes strongly to students' outstanding sense of safety at school. A small minority of students have high rates of attendance and the school has been successful in re-engaging a small number of students who have been persistently absent. However, the attendance of too many students is low, partly because boarding facilities are temporarily unavailable but also because management systems are not always sufficiently robust.

The school's leaders maintain a good overview of both strengths and weaknesses through ongoing, high-quality analysis of information about the quality of teaching and the progress students make as a result. Appropriate and successful actions have been taken, for example, to improve the quality of teaching through support and mentoring where this has been identified as not reaching the standards expected. The impact of the headteacher's vision has been expressed with great clarity by older students who describe the improvements they have seen over their time at the school. Of particular note are the activities with outside partnerships, such as the motor vehicle course, which have provided interesting and valuable opportunities for students. Staff at all levels share in, and subscribe to, this vision, demonstrating their commitment through the extra time they give to students by providing individual tuition and residential experiences. This concerted

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action to raise standards, based on the school's clear and accurate review of its performance, demonstrates the school's good capacity to sustain improvement.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that all students make good progress in lessons by:
 - developing the confidence of staff in accurately assessing the level at which students are working
 - establishing suitably high expectations of student achievement for those who are more able and sharing those expectations with all staff
 - planning and delivering challenging learning activities for individual students which take account of accurate assessment of prior learning and high expectations of the more able.
- Reduce student absence so that, by January 2012, at least 50% of students achieve or exceed the national average level of attendance for secondary age students by:
 - establishing clear responsibility and accountability for raising attendance within the school's leadership structure and governing body
 - focusing interventions upon an appropriate group of students by analysing and proactively responding to trends in individual pupil absence.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Students respond well to the expectations placed upon them by the school. This leads to behaviour which is normally good or better in lessons. As a result, learning proceeds at a good pace, students usually make good progress and enjoy their learning. They are particularly well engaged by practical lessons such as art, where they show a developing understanding of the cultures of other people, and design and technology. For example, in one lesson a Year 8 student demonstrated good resilience when the egg holder he was making broke unexpectedly as he worked on it. He responded quickly and positively to resolve the problem with the effective support of a member of staff. Students in the Year 7 nurture class make especially good and sometimes outstanding progress, building swiftly on low levels of basic literacy. An animated discussion over lunch clearly demonstrated how much they had enjoyed using their skills, knowledge and understanding to make replicas of Norman and Saxon shields and weapons.

Over time, students make better progress in mathematics and science than they do in English and information and communication technology (ICT). The school's leaders have recognised these relative weaknesses. They have made appropriate responses to them by using their partnership connections to improve the quality of assessment through moderation with other schools. They have also appointed new personnel to lead subject areas. When compared to outcomes for all students nationally, attainment remains low. However, the school ensures that its students are entered for appropriate levels of accredited qualifications and some recent leavers obtained GCSE in art and design as well as Entry Level certificates in English, mathematics, ICT and other subjects. Successful participation in vocational college courses and work experience are also good aspects of students' development of workplace skills.

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Relationships with the local community continue to develop positively, with students participating out of school hours in events hosted by the school, such as the Merstham Steam Fair. They also enjoy competing against other schools in sports competitions and taking part in regular outdoor education lessons. These make a strong contribution towards helping them adopt a healthy lifestyle. As a result of the school's rules and personal development lessons, some students have chosen to stop smoking and, despite the freedom to leave the school at lunchtime, most students in Key Stage 4 choose to stay on site and take advantage of the healthy meals provided by the school. The extended day provides a majority of students with further opportunities for active recreation which receive good take-up. The school's achievements in this area are recognised through the Healthy School and Activemark awards.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	4
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	1
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	4
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

How effective is the provision?

The school's curriculum is highly focused on the needs of its students. Within a balanced framework, students in Key Stage 3 benefit from a good programme of outdoor education and personal and social development lessons which help them to address the social and behavioural difficulties they experience. Where appropriate, students have access to individual tuition which supports improved development of literacy and numeracy skills. There is a shift in emphasis when students move into Key Stage 4, where preparation for the next stage of education and working life is prioritised. In addition to the basic skills of

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numeracy, literacy and ICT, recent changes mean that students can now choose from a good range of vocational and academic options including activities at local colleges and other provision away from the school site such as electronics, motor vehicle studies, bricklaying, catering and hairdressing. Science is currently not provided in the Key Stage 4 curriculum. Students' involvement in the Duke of Edinburgh's award and sports leader schemes is particularly effective in promoting responsibility and confidence.

Students are enthusiastic in lessons because teaching generally takes good account of their needs and interests. Occasionally, where expectations are too low because assessments of students' abilities are inaccurate or too cautious, work is not sufficiently challenging for those who are capable of working at higher levels. Students usually have a good understanding of what they need to do to improve their work or develop their learning because staff communicate this effectively, often through discussions in the classroom but also by written commentary on students' work. Teaching assistants and other adults are active in their support of students, although planning does not always make clear how they are involved in promoting the learning objectives to the students.

The reason why both students and parents say that this is 'the best school they have been to' is firmly rooted in the care that is provided by all members of staff. Students who have experienced exclusion from other schools are enabled to feel secure because they can seek the advice and support of their trusted adults or the inclusion support team at any time. The impact of this support is valued by students who talk of how their problem behaviours have reduced over time as a result of the help the staff give them. The personal needs of each individual are very well understood by all staff and excellent advice and guidance are valued. Former pupils visit regularly to share the success stories that the school has helped make possible. The inviting environment is valued and respected by students. Partnerships with external agencies are extensively and exceptionally well used to support students and their families experiencing crisis so that impact upon learning is minimised.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

The senior leadership of the school has been very effective in establishing an ethos of high expectations and continual improvement, which staff at all levels not only understand but fully endorse. This drive originates from the headteacher and builds upon the success of the work done since his appointment. It is realistically paced and as a result the positive impact remains sustainable. The success of the recent federation with a primary special

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school illustrates the strength of partnerships with other organisations in securing improved outcomes for students through increased sharing of good practice.

The governing body provides a good level of support and robust challenge to the headteacher. They are active in their support of the school and often visit classrooms and participate in training to ensure they have sufficient information to be useful in their role. They have been instrumental in securing improved boarding facilities, which are currently being constructed. Arrangements for safeguarding are good. Effective procedures are in place which are fully understood by all staff and well monitored by school leaders and governors. Training is frequent and appropriate and the school benefits from an allocated social worker. However, the management of attendance and absence procedures is not given sufficiently high status within the leadership team and there is no individual leader who is accountable for this area.

School leaders have a good understanding of the religious, ethnic and socio-economic background of the students and an appropriate plan is in place to address the issues that have been identified. However, the implementation of this plan is at a very early stage and its impact is not yet measureable. Therefore, the effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion is currently satisfactory. School leaders routinely monitor the performance of looked after children, those known to be entitled to free school meals and those from minority ethnic backgrounds to ensure that those at risk of discrimination are being as successful as their peers. The analysis shows that these groups are also making good progress and that the effectiveness of the school in promoting equal opportunities is good.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

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Views of parents and carers

A very small number of parents returned questionnaires. The responses were overwhelmingly positive. The school's analysis of parents' responses to its own questionnaire over two years shows a similarly positive and improving picture.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at St Nicholas School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspector received 3 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 50 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	2	67	1	33	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	2	67	1	33	0	0	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	2	67	1	33	0	0	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	1	33	2	67	0	0	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	2	67	1	33	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	2	67	1	33	0	0	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	2	67	1	33	0	0	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	2	67	1	33	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	3	100	0	0	0	0	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	2	67	1	33	0	0	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	2	67	1	33	0	0	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	2	67	1	33	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	3	100	0	0	0	0	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	58	36	4	2
Primary schools	8	43	40	9
Secondary schools	10	35	42	13
Sixth forms	13	39	45	3
Special schools	33	42	20	4
Pupil referral units	18	40	29	12
All schools	11	42	38	9

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2009 to 31 March 2010 and are the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn and spring terms 2009/10 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

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.



14 October 2010

Dear Students

Inspection of St Nicholas School, Redhill RH1 3PU

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave me when I visited your school recently. I enjoyed seeing you work hard in your lessons and I would particularly like to thank those of you who gave up the time to speak to me about your school.

I am pleased to tell you that I think St Nicholas is a good school, where most of you make good progress. You told me that one of the best things about your school is that the staff look after you well. I agree, in fact, I think the care, guidance and support they give you are an outstanding feature of your school. You demonstrate how proud you are to go to St Nicholas through your good behaviour and this means that your teachers can concentrate on preparing you well for the time when you will move on to college or work. The opportunities you have to do activities, which interest you and keep you healthy, are good and you use them well.

The staff who lead your school have a good understanding of how well you are doing and what they want to do to make your school experience even better. During my visit, I noticed that a few of you are not always given work which is challenging. So that you can always aim to do as well as you can, I have asked your headteacher to make sure that teachers always give you work which suits your individual abilities.

I also noticed that, while some of you attend school most of the time, there are too many students who don't come to school often enough. This means that I have also asked your school to work hard to get more of you to attend more regularly.

Some of you told me that you felt lucky to attend St Nicholas, so I hope that you will want to help the staff continue to make it an even better school for you. You can help by letting your teachers know if you think your work is too easy and by coming to school every day.

Yours sincerely

Jon Carter

Lead inspector

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