

St Nicholas Primary School

Inspection report

Unique reference number	123021
Local authority	Oxfordshire
Inspection number	380572
Inspection dates	22–23 March 2012
Lead inspector	Christine Field

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	421
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Shilpa Bhatt
Headteacher	Rachel Crouch
Date of previous school inspection	July 2009
School address	Raymund Road Old Marston Oxford OX3 0PJ
Telephone number	01865 242838
Fax number	01865 248029
Email address	admin.2352@st-nicholas-oxf.oxon.sch.uk

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Introduction

Inspection team

Christine Field	Additional inspector
Christine Pollitt	Additional inspector
Michael Phipps	Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. The inspectors observed teaching and learning in 27 lessons, with 11.5 hours in total spent observing 15 teachers and most teaching assistants. Inspectors held meetings with members of the governing body, staff and groups of pupils. Informal discussions were held with parents and carers during the inspection. Inspectors took account of the responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) in planning the inspection, observed the school's work and looked at policies, pupils' books, progress data, safeguarding records and evidence of the monitoring of teaching and learning. The team examined 139 questionnaires from parents and carers, 75 from pupils in Key Stage 2 and 33 from staff.

Information about the school

St Nicholas is a larger than average primary school. The majority of pupils are of White British heritage with 48% from minority ethnic groups, the largest group being of Pakistani heritage. A relatively high proportion of pupils, predominantly in the Early Years Foundation Stage and Year 1, are at the earlier stages of learning to speak English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is just below average. The proportion of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs is above the national average. An Autism Resource Base (ARB) adjacent to the school caters for 14 pupils, all of whom have a statement of special educational needs. Many of the pupils who attend the base join main school classes for part of the time. The school has been accredited with the International Award 2011 and Eco Green Flag 2010 award. During the inspection, phase two of a major building programme was underway and necessitated temporary changes to the school's usual organisation.

The school did not meet the government's current floor standards in 2011. The school's results include the standards attained by the pupils who attend the ARB.

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	3
Achievement of pupils	3
Quality of teaching	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils	2
Leadership and management	3

Key findings

- This is a satisfactory school. Inspection evidence shows that pupils' attainment is improving during this year and for those nearing the end of Key Stage 2 they are at national expectations. The school is not better than satisfactory because of inconsistencies in the quality of teaching and not all pupils have achieved as well as they could in the past; pupils' attainment fell below the government's minimum standard in 2011.
- Achievement is satisfactory and improving due to well-structured intervention sessions that are enabling pupils to make up lost ground. This is particularly so in reading where the systematic attention to building phonics (linking letters with the sounds they make) is paying dividends. Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs, including those with statements, achieve well.
- Teaching is satisfactory with some effective teaching especially for Year 6 pupils enabling them to make accelerated progress. At its best, teaching is imaginative and successfully entuses boys and girls to work hard on a variety of tasks. Teaching, though, suffers from inconsistencies in the precision of learning intentions, levels of challenge and the quality of marking.
- Behaviour and attendance are good. Bullying is rare and pupils feel safe. Pupils enjoy coming to school because it is 'a good place to be'. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is well fostered by a rich curriculum. Relationships are harmonious and multicultural diversity and inclusivity are positively celebrated.
- Leadership and management are satisfactory. The leadership of teaching is improving and bringing about better outcomes, particularly for pupils in the Early Years Foundation Stage, Key Stage 1 and Year 6. There remain though, inconsistencies in its quality. Accurate self-evaluation of strengths and weaknesses and robust performance management arrangements are increasing the school's capacity to improve and raise standards further. The governing

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body does not challenge the work of the school sufficiently.

Schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise achievement by improving teaching and learning so that progress is consistently good or better in all lessons by ensuring that:
 - teachers set clear learning intentions so that pupils know what they have to learn
 - lesson activities provide the right level of challenge so that learning for all pupils moves at a good pace
 - marking always identifies how well pupils are working towards their targets and how they can move up a level.

- Strengthen further the impact of leadership and management by:
 - sharpening the focus of lesson monitoring so that leaders identify precisely what elements of teaching result in the best progress for all pupils
 - developing the governing body's role in evaluating the work of the school.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

When children join the Nursery their skills and knowledge are typically well below the level expected for their age, particularly in communication, language and literacy. They learn successfully to nearly reach the levels expected nationally by the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage when they transfer to Year 1. Most pupils continue to build their skills, knowledge and understanding well throughout Key Stage 1, particularly in reading because of the systematic attention given to phonics. Attainment in reading is higher than in writing or mathematics across the school. In lessons, pupils enjoy learning because of the varied activities and the good relationships they have with teachers and teaching assistants. For example, in Year 2, pupils were given plenty of opportunities to not only gain in scientific knowledge and understanding about skeletons in a science lesson but also to build confident speaking and listening skills through sharing ideas with a 'talk partner'. The teacher's reminder about vocabulary, connectives, and punctuation (VCOP) techniques when writing sentences about what they had learnt led to high quality work. Pupils learning to speak English as an additional language benefit from tailor-made support that assists the development of their literacy and numeracy skills. A third of the high-ability pupils in Year 2 who are working at above average levels in mathematics are

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also learning to speak English as an additional language.

During Key Stage 2, boys and girls are now making satisfactory progress overall with good progress evident in reading. Progress accelerates in Year 6 and pupils are catching up, for example in securely learning times tables. Pupils are well motivated, keen to answer questions and readily tackle the tasks and activities set. Although historic national test data show that pupils' attainment fell below average, for current Year 6 pupils it is broadly average. Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs, including those from the ARB, enjoy their time at school and their achievement is good.

A large majority of parents and carers reported that their children are making good progress. Inspection evidence shows that although some pupils' progress is good in some years it is not consistently above that seen nationally and achievement is therefore satisfactory.

Quality of teaching

Most parents and carers regard teaching as good. School data and inspection findings show that teaching is good over time in the Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1, but it is not consistent across all subjects and year groups in Key Stage 2 and overall it is satisfactory. Good teaching in Year 6 is helping pupils make up lost ground from the past and helping them reach the standards expected for their age. Teachers and staff enjoy positive relationships with pupils and lessons take place in a calm and purposeful environment that is conducive to learning. Teachers promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development effectively, for example by uniformly applying the school's behaviour policy. There is a good mix of adult-led and child-selected learning in the Early Years Foundation Stage with key workers interacting well with the children to develop their learning through structured play. Teaching assistants are highly skilled in assisting disabled pupils and those with special educational needs to learn successfully. The system of assessing how much progress these pupils have made after every lesson is good.

Teachers' expectations enable most pupils to work hard. In the best lessons boys and girls learn successfully because they work at a good pace, are set tasks that interest and sustain their engagement and are given challenging activities that push their knowledge and skills forward. This was well illustrated in a Year 6 mathematics lesson in which pupils quickly chose the method that suited them best as they worked out a series of calculations, sharing approaches and working speedily and accurately. Imaginative ideas for lessons seek to hook pupils' interest right from the outset; for example in a Year 4 English lesson the use of a genuine Masai warrior's spear stimulated pupils' critical thinking and language skills as they identified a good range of vocabulary to describe how the spear might be used. This level of engagement of pupils is not always the case.

In less effective lessons imprecise learning intentions, a slower pace and lack of

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challenge inhibit good progress. For example, when the most able mathematicians finish the work they have been set they fill time rather than move on to the next challenge. Marking is regular and typically encouraging but it does not always make clear how pupils can improve their work and only occasionally links to individual targets.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Overwhelmingly, parents and carers identify that behaviour over time is good and their children are kept safe, and inspectors agree. While a very small minority of parental questionnaires suggested that some lessons can be disrupted by poor behaviour, this was not the case during the inspection. Scrutiny of behaviour records and discussions with pupils confirm that behaviour in lessons is generally good over time. The school tackles racism and extremist behaviours head on and in consequence instances are very rare. Pupils in discussion identified that there is hardly any physical bullying, name calling or cyber-bullying. When there is an incident, it is dealt with quickly and fairly by staff. The words of one pupil sum up the views of many, 'I love coming to St Nicks'.

From the Early Years Foundation Stage onwards pupils give a warm welcome to visitors, respond enthusiastically to questions about their school and are keen to explain what they are learning. In lessons, they show good attitudes, which make an important contribution to their achievement. When given the opportunity, pupils work well together in paired or group activities. Relationships are respectful and tolerant and assist the pupils' good sense of well-being. For some pupils with special educational needs good behaviour is a challenge; the sensitive support of staff helps them to manage their emotions successfully.

The school's policies and strategies for dealing with any unacceptable behaviour are effective and well understood. 'Fix it Fridays' are a new strategy that involve pupils taking time out to review the consequence of their actions. Pupils perceive them to be fair. Exclusions are a last resort sanction seldom used. Attendance is above average and punctuality is good. Pupils' questionnaire responses confirm that they feel safe and happy at school and that behaviour is good.

Leadership and management

Following the dip in standards in 2011, the headteacher moved swiftly to set the school on an improving course. Key improvements included the establishment of a robust system for tracking progress, setting up smaller single-age classes, restructuring the senior team, and making staff changes that have resulted in teachers appointed whose skills complement those of existing staff. The school's data and inspection findings show that these initiatives are contributing positively to accelerating pupils' progress and raising attainment. Accurate self-evaluation and the embedding of essential systems are enabling the school to tackle past underachievement effectively and demonstrating the capacity to continue to improve.

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There is good confidence in the headteacher's leadership, and a strong commitment by staff to raising attainment and working to maximise all pupils' achievements. The quality of teaching is improving as a result of strategies such as coaching and peer observation, well-targeted professional development and robust performance management. The school works effectively to promote equalities and boys and girls from different ethnic backgrounds are equally well supported. The school is not yet identifying precisely the elements of teaching that result in the best progress for all pupils and sharing best practice widely. One comment sums up staff views, 'I am proud to be part of a fantastic nurturing team who are committed to helping our children learn and achieve.'

The strengths identified in the broad and balanced curriculum by the previous inspection have been sustained and it provides well for pupils' personal needs including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. There is sensitive guidance on respecting cultural differences and how to respond to the various emotions and needs of others. Enrichment opportunities, such as visits and the many extra-curricular clubs, enhance learning experiences well. School staff forge effective links with parents and carers, with most being very pleased with the inclusive education the school provides, which inspectors agree is an important feature.

The governing body is developing its knowledge of the school and its work and governors are undertaking training to enable them to carry out their duties as 'critical friends' effectively. Although developing well, its role in evaluating the school's performance has not been robust enough. The governing body ensures that arrangements to eliminate any discrimination and keep pupils safe meet statutory requirements.

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	46	46	8	0
Primary schools	8	47	40	5
Secondary schools	14	38	40	8
Special schools	28	48	20	4
Pupil referral units	15	50	29	5
All schools	11	46	38	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 31 August 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance:	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour:	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and 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 governors and 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:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
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.
Safety:	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

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.



27 March 2012

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Nicholas Primary School, Oxford, OX3 0PJ

Thank you for the friendly welcome you gave us when we came to inspect your school. We enjoyed talking with you and listening to your views. We found out that your school is providing you with a satisfactory education. This means that some things are going well, but there are things that could be better.

Your good behaviour was very pleasing to see in lessons and around the school. You told us that you feel safe and that there is very little bullying. It was good to hear that you enjoy school because everyone gets on so well together and the staff are caring and supportive. Your teachers work hard to develop your confidence and to encourage you to reflect on your behaviour. This helps you to develop mature and sensible attitudes. It is great to see your attendance getting better – well done!

We found that teaching is satisfactory and that you make satisfactory progress in lessons. When teaching is good, you do better and we want more lessons to include the features of the very best so that you can reach your full potential. Teachers take care to plan interesting activities for you, including trips and residential visits. The clubs after school seem to offer something for everyone from gardening to Italian.

We have asked your headteacher, leaders and governors to keep a close check on what is going on and for everyone to work together to make sure that you achieve better results in English and mathematics by the time you leave the school. We want teachers to improve your lessons so that you learn as much as possible in the time available, to make sure that activities are challenging enough, and that marking makes clear how you can improve your work.

You can help by continuing to do your best and letting your teacher know if you want harder work. We wish you every success in the future.

Yours sincerely

Christine Field
Lead inspector

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