

St Nicholas School

Inspection report

| | |
|--------------------------------|-------------------|
| Unique Reference Number | 126552 |
| Local Authority | Wiltshire |
| Inspection number | 360106 |
| Inspection dates | 23–24 March 2011 |
| Reporting inspector | Christine Emerson |

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

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|--|--|
| Type of school | Special |
| School category | Community special |
| Age range of pupils | 2–19 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Gender of pupils in the sixth form | Mixed |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | 72 |
| Of which, number on roll in the sixth form | 12 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Mrs Aileen Bates |
| Headteacher | Mrs Jill Owen |
| Date of previous school inspection | 28 November 2007 |
| School address | Malmesbury Road Wiltshire SN15 1QF |
| Telephone number | 01249650435 |
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. The inspectors observed 12 lessons or part lessons and undertook a learning walk with the headteacher, where a short time was spent in a number of classes. All teachers and the medical coordinator were seen leading lessons. The inspectors had discussions with pupils, staff, the School Improvement Partner and two governors. They observed the school's work and examined in detail the files of three pupils, as well as the school's assessment and tracking files. A wide range of documentation was also scrutinised, including the school's development plan and policy documents for safeguarding and other statutory requirements. The inspectors looked at the 36 questionnaires returned by parents and carers.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- How effectively the school is using information gathered from assessment to set challenging targets and to match work set to pupils' individual learning levels.
- Whether higher attaining pupils are achieving well enough.
- Whether lessons and other activities are suitably adapted so that all groups of pupils, including those with additional needs such as multisensory impairment or challenging behaviour, make at least good progress.
- The impact of the school's specialist status on improving the curriculum.
- Whether pupils are prepared well enough for living in the culturally diverse society of the United Kingdom.

Information about the school

St Nicholas serves the whole of north Wiltshire. All pupils have a statement of special educational needs for severe learning difficulties or profound and multiple learning difficulties. A large majority of pupils have additional difficulties such as autistic spectrum disorder (ASD), challenging behaviour or sensory impairment. An increasing number of pupils joining the school have complex medical conditions. There are fewer girls than boys. All pupils speak English as their first language and the vast majority are of White British heritage. A few pupils are looked after in public care. The proportion known to be eligible for free school meals is above average. The very few children of Reception age learn alongside pupils in the primary department. Post-16 students are taught as a discrete class. Pupils with very challenging behaviour receive additional support through the resource base. The school has recently gained Healthy Schools status and has held specialist school status for cognition and learning since 2009. There is an on-site after-school club which is run by a voluntary committee.

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. There has been a strong trend of improvement since the previous inspection. This is because the headteacher has been very effective in restructuring the way in which the school is led and managed to involve staff at all levels. Consequently, all staff are very enthusiastic and committed to developing the school further. Staff understand the pupils' needs very well and there are extremely strong links with parents and carers as well as outstanding partnerships with medical personnel and therapists. As a result, the school offers pupils an excellent quality of care and support. Guidance is also very strong and, through the school's use of 'person centred planning', pupils are supported very well to help them to participate in decisions about their lives. The school's specialist status for cognition and learning has had a significant impact on the curriculum through increasing community links. Pupils now have access to an outstanding curriculum with a very good balance of core skills, National Curriculum subjects and therapy.

The reorganisation of teaching groups to reflect pupils' ability and the particular special needs of different pupils, such as those with very challenging behaviour or ASD, has been effective and boosted pupils' progress. The quality of education is consistently good across the whole school, including the Early Years Foundation Stage and in the sixth form. Teaching is good with strengths in the very good relationships between staff and pupils and the lively and interesting lessons. Pupils enjoy learning and are keen to participate. As a result they learn well. However, staff do not always place enough emphasis on encouraging and supporting pupils to interact with each other. Consequently, pupils' ability to practise their social and communication skills is sometimes restricted. On occasions there is too much focus on working with individual pupils. This can reduce the opportunities for some other pupils in the group to participate fully in all activities. Assessment has improved a great deal over recent years and is now used well to adapt work to pupils' individual levels. As a consequence, higher-attaining pupils are now given work which challenges them. Pupils' progress is carefully tracked and the school's detailed records demonstrate that all groups of pupils are making good progress towards achieving the challenging targets which are set for them.

Pupils feel extremely safe in the happy and nurturing environment which the school has created and have a very good awareness of how to keep themselves safe. This confidence is shared by their parents and carers. As a result of the school's strong focus on helping the pupils to gain as much independence as possible, they make good progress in developing their personal and social skills. A particular strength is the use of a house in the community to help pupils to learn independent living skills. Through a variety of initiatives, such as the active school and sixth form councils and membership of the local children's parliament, pupils make an outstanding contribution to both the school and the local community.

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The provision is a very cohesive community. However, although an action plan is in place, the school is still at an early stage in promoting community cohesion. In particular, pupils do not have enough practical opportunities to prepare them to live in the diverse society of the United Kingdom. The school's self-evaluation is detailed and accurate. The school's current performance, its understanding of what it is doing well and what needs improving and the impact of actions taken since the previous inspection all demonstrate a good capacity for sustained improvement.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise pupils' achievement and promote their social development by:
 - ensuring that all pupils are fully involved in every part of each lesson
 - providing more opportunities in lessons for pupils to interact with each other.
- Prepare pupils for living in the culturally diverse society of the United Kingdom by:
 - developing and extending links with schools in other parts of the country
 - giving pupils more practical opportunities to experience different faiths and cultures.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**2**

Pupils enjoy lessons a great deal and are keen to join in as much as they can. Because work is well adapted to their individual needs, all groups of pupils learn well and make good progress. For example, very sensitive and skilled support enables pupils with complex physical and learning difficulties to feel comfortable and to develop important skills such as using eye pointing to make choices. Higher-attaining pupils make equally good progress because they are given challenging targets and are encouraged to work as independently as possible. This was very evident in a number group for pupils in Years 10 to 14, where higher attaining pupils in the group were making excellent progress in recognising and naming numbers. Pupils' behaviour is good because of the very good relationships between staff and pupils which are evident throughout the school. Rigorous behaviour management systems, which are developed with the support of external behaviour specialists, enable pupils in the resource base to make good progress in reducing their very challenging behaviours. Pupils make good progress in learning how to stay healthy, which is recognised by the Healthy Schools status. For example, some pupils told the inspectors that, although they enjoy eating chips, they should not have them too often. Pupils are supported well to make an excellent contribution to both the school and the wider community. This was evident during the inspection when a child in the Early Years Foundation Stage, with considerable effort, determination and very good support, was able to take the class register to the school office. Students in the sixth form take their responsibilities very seriously. The sixth form council is very clear that it has a duty to 'help the little ones'. Because pupils enjoy coming to school, their attendance is good despite the problems which many of them have with their personal health. The focus on developing independent living skills which permeates the school prepares pupils well for life in the community. Pupils' spiritual and moral development is very good and they have a very good understanding of right and wrong. Social development is good overall, although pupils do not always have the opportunity to benefit from interacting with each other in lessons. Pupils enjoy cultural events such as visiting music groups but have only

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limited practical opportunities to learn about the different faiths and cultures which contribute to British society.

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 | |
| 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 | 1 |
| The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being | 2 |
| Taking into account: | |
| Pupils' attendance ¹ | 2 |
| 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

* In some special schools inspectors do not make a judgement about attainment in relation to expectations of the pupils' age.

How effective is the provision?

Teaching is consistently good with a few outstanding lessons being observed during the inspection. The growing involvement of all teachers in monitoring teaching is effective in improving the quality of lessons. For example, information from the assessment of pupils' progress is now used well to plan lessons. Teachers have good subject knowledge and understanding of working with pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Lessons are very lively with good use of a variety of activities and resources. This maintains pupils' interest and attention so that they learn well. An example of this was in an outstanding lesson for Reception and primary-aged pupils with complex physical and learning needs. The lesson moved at just the right pace for the levels of the pupils and they were delighted by the excellent practical experiences such as wearing the 'postman's hat'. Staff were very effectively deployed to maximise the involvement of all pupils in every part of the lesson. Because the teacher was extremely skilled at using every opportunity to encourage interactions, some really positive communication took place. For example, with encouragement, one pupil used a communication aide to greet another who

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responded by looking. However, although staff throughout the school give pupils good individual support, this clear focus on social interaction and consistent pupil participation is not yet evident in all lessons. Extensive links with other schools enable the school to offer a very full and varied curriculum and a range of sporting opportunities, in spite of the limited specialist accommodation and small grounds. There is an excellent range of lunchtime clubs which are extremely well attended. High quality personal care and medical plans are in place and well used. This means that all pupils, including particularly vulnerable pupils such as those with acute medical needs, are extremely well cared for.

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 | 1 |
| The effectiveness of care, guidance and support | 1 |

How effective are leadership and management?

The ambition of the headteacher and leadership team to create an outstanding school is shared by all staff. Monitoring and evaluation are strong and development planning is well focused. Consequently, the school is developing well. All changes to provision, such as the recent reorganisation of the classes in the primary department, are planned in detail and evaluated carefully. This is effective in ensuring that new initiatives are working well. The school is making demonstrable progress towards achieving the challenging targets in its development plan. Monitoring of teaching and learning is thorough and much improved since the previous inspection. The governors have a good range of relevant experience and expertise. They provide good support as well as challenging the school when necessary. The very good individual support which pupils receive, and good monitoring of pupils' progress ensure that equality of opportunity and tackling discrimination are promoted well and that all groups of pupils have their needs well met. Safeguarding procedures are thorough, rigorous and effective and fully meet all statutory requirements. The school has carried out an audit and prepared an action plan to ensure that community cohesion is promoted effectively. However, this area of strategic planning is at a relatively early stage. The school rightly recognises through its development planning that it needs to continue its focus on promoting community cohesion beyond the school, for example by developing and extending links with other schools, to raise pupils' awareness. The school makes good use of its resources and provides good value for money.

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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 | 1 |
| The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being | 1 |
| 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 |

Early Years Foundation Stage

The small number of children in the Reception year have their needs well met. Through a carefully planned timetable, they are taught with pupils in the primary department with similar needs, as well as through sessions in an Early Years group. Very strong links with parents and carers and Early Years settings ensure that children settle well and make a successful start to their education. Teaching is good overall. Detailed assessments and pictorial evidence demonstrate that the children are making good progress, particularly in important social skills such as learning to function in a group. The Early Years Foundation Stage leader has excellent teaching skills and provides good leadership for the staff team.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

| | |
|--|----------|
| Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage | 2 |
| Taking into account: Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage | 2 |
| The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage | 2 |
| The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage | 2 |

Sixth form

The sixth form prepares students well to move on to college or other specialist placements and there are good links to support their transition. Students have good opportunities to

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take responsibility and to develop independent living skills which will help them to play a part in the community. Members of the sixth form told the inspectors that they really enjoy being in the sixth form and particularly like doing 'grown up stuff' when they learn to prepare meals and carry out household tasks in the nearby house which the school leases. Students follow a flexible timetable according to their individual needs, which includes a variety of suitable courses, such as 'Towards Independence', and opportunities for work experience. Higher-attaining students access accredited courses in subjects such as catering and building at another special school. Teaching in the sixth form is good. This was evident in an effective first aid lesson where students made good progress in understanding how to recognise if someone is choking and what to do about it. The students were sensible and mature and demonstrated concern and care for others. The sixth form is led and managed well by an effective staff team.

These are the grades for the sixth form

| | |
|--|----------|
| Overall effectiveness of the sixth form | 2 |
| Taking into account: | |
| Outcomes for students in the sixth form | 2 |
| The quality of provision in the sixth form | 2 |
| Leadership and management of the sixth form | 2 |

Views of parents and carers

Around half of all parents and carers responded to the questionnaire. Most views expressed were very positive. Typical comments were: 'It is an enjoyable and stimulating community, and my son has definitely thrived there' and 'A very friendly school and very approachable'. Several parents and carers raised concerns about the limited outside play areas. The inspection team explored this issue and concluded that the school makes effective use of its grounds and gives pupils opportunities for physical activity, accessing facilities in the community.

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 inspection team received 36 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 72 pupils registered at the school.

| Statements | Strongly agree | | Agree | | Disagree | | Strongly disagree | |
|---|----------------|----|-------|----|----------|---|-------------------|---|
| | Total | % | Total | % | Total | % | Total | % |
| My child enjoys school | 23 | 64 | 12 | 33 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| The school keeps my child safe | 24 | 67 | 11 | 31 | 1 | 3 | 0 | 0 |
| My school informs me about my child's progress | 25 | 69 | 10 | 28 | 1 | 3 | 0 | 0 |
| My child is making enough progress at this school | 21 | 58 | 14 | 39 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 3 |
| The teaching is good at this school | 23 | 64 | 13 | 36 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| The school helps me to support my child's learning | 22 | 61 | 12 | 33 | 2 | 6 | 0 | 0 |
| The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle | 18 | 50 | 17 | 47 | 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) | 21 | 58 | 13 | 36 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| The school meets my child's particular needs | 27 | 75 | 8 | 22 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 3 |
| The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour | 20 | 56 | 12 | 33 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 3 |
| The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns | 21 | 58 | 14 | 39 | 1 | 3 | 0 | 0 |
| The school is led and managed effectively | 22 | 61 | 12 | 33 | 1 | 3 | 0 | 0 |
| Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school | 27 | 75 | 8 | 22 | 1 | 3 | 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

| | Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools) | | | |
|----------------------|---|------|--------------|------------|
| Type of school | Outstanding | Good | Satisfactory | Inadequate |
| Nursery schools | 59 | 35 | 3 | 3 |
| Primary schools | 9 | 44 | 39 | 7 |
| Secondary schools | 13 | 36 | 41 | 11 |
| Sixth forms | 15 | 39 | 43 | 3 |
| Special schools | 35 | 43 | 17 | 5 |
| Pupil referral units | 21 | 42 | 29 | 9 |
| All schools | 13 | 43 | 37 | 8 |

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 August 2010 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 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.

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

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.



25 March 2011

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Nicholas School, Chippenham SN15 1QF

Thank you for being so friendly and helpful when we inspected your school. We really enjoyed finding out about the things you are doing and talking to you. It was very useful to know what you think about your school. Your parents and carers think you go to a good school and the inspection findings support their views.

There are some things that are outstanding in your school.

- You are given excellent care and support so that you feel extremely safe and learn well.
- You all make an outstanding contribution to the school and to your community
- The school provides an interesting range of activities and clubs.
- The school has excellent links with your parents and carers and all the other people, such as nurses, who look after you.

We have asked your teachers to do a few things to make the school even better. These are:

- to help you to interact with each other in lessons and to support you so that you are all fully involved in all activities
- to help you to learn more about other people who live in this country.

hope all of you carry on enjoying what you are doing and help the teachers by trying hard in lessons and helping others.

ours sincerely

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