

# St Nicholas School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	115444
<b>Local Authority</b>	Southend-on-Sea
<b>Inspection number</b>	357750
<b>Inspection dates</b>	24–25 May 2011
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Lucie Calow

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Special
<b>School category</b>	Community special
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–16
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	77
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Barry Levitt
<b>Headteacher</b>	June Mitchell
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	6 November 2007
<b>School address</b>	Philpott Avenue Southend-on-Sea SS2 4RL
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## Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. Eleven lessons were observed and one learning walk conducted during which eight teachers were seen. Meetings were held with students, members of the school leadership team and with representatives of the governing body. Inspectors observed the school's work and looked at arrangements for safeguarding, a wide range of documentation including the school's self-evaluation form, progress tracking data, a range of policies and local authority reports. They analysed 19 parent and carer questionnaires and considered 40 student and 15 staff questionnaires.

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

- How successfully does the school provide for individual students' needs through care, guidance and support including managing behaviour and attendance?
- How much progress do students' make from their individual starting points in their academic learning and in the development of their social and communication skills?

## Information about the school

St Nicholas is a special school for students in Key Stages 3 and 4 who have learning difficulties and communication and interaction difficulties. All students have a statement of special educational needs. The majority have moderate learning difficulties and a small minority also have social and emotional difficulties. Approximately two thirds of students are boys. More students than average start or leave the school at times other than at the beginning or end of a key stage. Year group numbers currently fluctuate between eight and 26 students. St Nicholas was, until 2005, an all age special school making provision for younger pupils. The large majority of students are of White British heritage with a small proportion from minority ethnic heritage and a very few who speak English as an additional language. A high proportion of students are known to be eligible for free school meals (approximately three times the national average.) The school has achieved a range of awards including an Active mark and Sports mark, International Schools award, Investors in People and has Healthy Schools status.

**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 with a strong sense of community and a well organised staff team. Leadership and management are good because actions to improve the quality of teaching, student behaviour and progress have been effective. The governing body provides a good balance of support and challenge to the school and in particular has championed the necessary improvements to school buildings. The school provides a calm and secure environment in which students settle well to their learning. Students appreciate the personal support they receive through quality communication with staff.

Teaching is good and some outstanding teaching was observed. As a result, students make good progress in their lessons. Teachers are skilful in meeting the personal learning needs of students. However, not all students are as clearly aware of their targets as their teachers are. Current marking systems do not routinely clarify this for them. The school has identified a proportion of its students as being gifted and talented in particular areas of their learning and some specific provision is made for them. While these students make good progress from their starting points, their learning could be accelerated even further across lessons. Accreditation routes are currently being expanded to meet the needs of this group, for example, a GCSE in physical education has been introduced this year. Still more are needed to fully reflect the strengths of all students.

Attendance is below average for the student population as a whole. However, many students attend very well and a significant number improve their attendance during their time at the school. A very small minority of students do not attend well enough. The school has good strategies to encourage regular attendance and these generally meet with success with all but a very few students. For them the school seeks support and partnership with parents and carers and with other agencies. While this has had an impact on some, it has not yet had enough impact on all. Parent and carer questionnaires reflect a positive view of the school but some parents and carers feel they could be better supported to help their children learn at home. The school does not routinely provide homework.

Staff at St Nicholas are successful at providing secondary schooling in improved buildings. There is a strong sense of school community. In their questionnaires, all students said they feel prepared for the future. However, some elements of primary experience continue. For example, lunchtime arrangements are more suitable to younger pupils, some classroom resources are not age appropriate and while the curriculum is good there are some missed opportunities to make it entirely age appropriate.

The school's good capacity to improve further is demonstrated through the success it has already experienced in raising standards. A range of progress data is collected and, while some systems are in the early stages, use is beginning to be made of it to compare rates of progress for different groups of students and to set targets. Individual tracking of

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student progress has been established for longer. Self-evaluation is thorough and monitored effectively through the governing body.

## What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Accelerate the speed of student progress further by:
  - making sure that students know how well they are doing and how to improve their work through marking
  - increasing expectations for gifted and talented students and ensuring that appropriate accreditation is in place for this group across all subjects as they progress through the school.
- Increase the impact of engagement with parents and carers so that:
  - attendance is improved for the few students who do not attend frequently enough
  - they are able to support their childrens' learning and development at home.
- Revise systems and resources so that a secondary school identity is secured throughout the school day.

## Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

In line with their special educational needs and learning disabilities, students enter the school with attainment well below the national average. Approximately one quarter of students also arrive having experienced turbulence in their previous education. For example, they may have been excluded, at risk of exclusion, had a history of low attendance, or exhibited challenging behaviours. The school has a significant number of students who transfer part way through a key stage or year group. The very large majority of students meet or exceed their school based targets and this represents good progress from their low starting points.

Teachers secure good progress through a range of delivery styles. Inspectors observed some teaching which was creative and dynamic, and some which was quieter and slower paced. Good progress is achieved across these styles because lessons are well structured and based on extending students personal learning.

Inspectors observed students to be polite, attentive in lessons and well behaved including those with social and emotional difficulties. Students are often considerate towards each other and make friends. Incidents of poor behaviour do occur but the school has effective strategies to deal with them based on restorative justice. Some external agencies, such as community police officers, are regular visitors and work closely with the school to support individual students. However, name calling remains a concern for some students although they speak positively of the schools capacity to deal effectively with it. Poor behaviour no longer disrupts learning and exclusions have considerably reduced. Good behaviour in lessons is achieved through interesting teaching that engages students' interest aligned with skilful behaviour management and individual support.

The school has a clear focus on improving health through physical activity. Physical education is a valued part of the curriculum and well resourced with a new sports hall and gymnasium. Students take part in matches by being members of boys and girls football

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teams and in swimming galas. Students understand they need to eat well and exercise in order to live a healthy lifestyle.

Students embrace not only sporting opportunities but also cultural and artistic experiences. For example, visits to art galleries, museums, the ballet and theatre and places of worship. They increase their social skills, for example, through residential visits. School resources provide good opportunities for reflection on pertinent issues and extending students' awareness of the world such as through the texts chosen in English.

The extent to which students develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being is good because they make good progress in acquiring basic skills and personal qualities such as positive behaviour. They are inspired to do well, for example, to achieve a GCSE qualification in art. They have a good understanding of the next steps they need to take through careers evenings, weekly day release to college and work experience placements.

*These are the grades for pupils' outcomes*

<b>Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account:	*
Pupils' attainment <sup>1</sup>	
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
<b>The extent to which pupils feel safe</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Pupils' behaviour</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance <sup>1</sup>	3
<b>The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development</b>	<b>2</b>

<sup>1</sup> 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?**

Good teaching is the reason why good progress is achieved. Lessons engage students' interest and relate learning to real life situations. For example, learning about plug wires

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through drama. Teachers have sound subject knowledge and support staff are effectively deployed. Oral feedback to students is good and teachers check understanding through effective questioning as lessons progress. Students' behaviour in lessons is good. Feedback through marking is less effective and in some lessons there is an over reliance on worksheets.

The curriculum is broad, balanced and relevant. It is good because this is enhanced through a range of enriching experiences and is frequently personalised to meet students' needs. For example, through residential trips, visits to places of interest and through college and work experience links. The curriculum plays a major part in ensuring pupils know how to keep themselves safe, for example, during science lessons and through personal, social and health education. There are some missed opportunities to make the curriculum age appropriate, for example, topic work involving a modern foreign language has a primary approach which some students have outgrown.

The school has developed a number of strategies to provide students with good care, guidance and support such as through the OASIS centre, developed in partnership with educational psychology services. Individual support sessions based on meeting emotional, communication, behaviour and interaction needs are available to students with highly specific needs. Students are appreciative of these and recognise them as helpful. Students recognised as gifted and talented have opportunity to pursue additional interests together such as photography.

*These are the grades for the quality of provision*

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

## **How effective are leadership and management?**

Standards have improved because of effective leadership and management. There are clear lines of responsibility and accountability within an ethos of mutual support and collaboration. This includes school staff and members of the governing body. Governors are regular, active visitors to the school. They know the school very well and provide effective challenge. At the time of the previous inspection they were described as impressive and this remains the case. They have driven through improvements to the school building to the benefit of their students. They have clear systems for monitoring both the work of the school and their own effectiveness. The school's capacity for sustained improvement is good as a result of the proven effectiveness of leadership and management.

Safeguarding procedures are robust and thorough. Internal procedures, when concerns are raised, are quick and clear and there is good communication between staff. The school seeks out appropriate collaborative work with key agencies such as the youth offending

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team and social services. Risk assessment procedures are embedded practice and help to keep students safe, for example, during off site visits.

Links with parents and carers are satisfactory and some parents feel very well supported by the school. Views of parents and carers are sought, for example, through questionnaires and trial support groups have been piloted. The school provides a home school liaison manager who works closely with individual families and key agencies. However the school is having limited success with the numbers of parents and carers it has forged highly effective relationships with so that learning and development is routinely supported across both settings. Parents and carers attend social and student events in good numbers but workshops and questionnaires have not proved as popular and still more strategies to engage all parents and carers are required.

Equality of opportunity is good because the school has pursued ambitious strategies for particular groups of students. For example, by establishing the OASIS centre to meet the highly specific needs of individual students, providing some group support for female students, and meeting the needs of its most challenging students, so that exclusions have been greatly reduced. Appropriate monitoring and recording systems are in place and there is very little variation in progress between different groups. Most recent data suggest that there may be some small variations between girls and boys emerging in some subjects and the school is well placed to close these gaps further.

The school has good plans for promoting community cohesion based on a clear understanding of its context. Their impact is evaluated and the school can point to striking examples where community relations have improved as a result. For example, a recent venture involving contact with a local church has brought members of the public to the school and given students the opportunity to offer hospitality. Cultural visits have an impact, for example, visits to exhibitions are followed up in art lessons. Diversity awareness is raised through visits to places of worship and through displays. The school has fostered international links with partner schools.



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*These are the grades for leadership and management*

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

## Views of parents and carers

The very large majority of parents and carers who responded to the survey agreed that their children enjoy school, that they make enough progress, that teaching is good and that the school meets their individual needs. Inspectors also found that progress, teaching and the curriculum are good. Fewer parents and carers, but still the large majority, said that the school helps them support their children's learning at home and that the school takes account of their comments and concerns. Inspectors found that there are clear and accessible channels for parents and carers to communicate with school but that the effectiveness of engagement could be enhanced. A very small minority disagreed that they were happy with their children's experience at the school.

## 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 19 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 77 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	11	58	7	37	1	5	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	12	63	4	21	1	5	1	5
My school informs me about my child's progress	10	53	6	32	2	11	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	8	42	10	53	0	0	1	5
The teaching is good at this school	9	47	9	47	1	5	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	9	47	6	32	1	5	1	5
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	10	53	6	32	1	5	1	5
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)	9	47	7	37	0	0	1	5
The school meets my child's particular needs	11	58	7	37	0	0	1	5
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	12	63	5	26	1	5	1	5
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	9	47	6	32	1	5	2	11
The school is led and managed effectively	8	42	8	42	2	11	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	10	53	7	37	1	5	1	5

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	46	48	6	0
Primary schools	6	47	40	7
Secondary schools	12	39	38	11
Sixth forms	13	42	41	3
Special schools	28	49	19	4
Pupil referral units	14	45	31	10
All schools	10	46	37	7

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 2010 to 31 December 2010 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://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.

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"><li>■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.</li><li>■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.</li><li>■ The quality of teaching.</li><li>■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.</li><li>■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.</li></ul>
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.**



26 May 2011

Dear Students

**Inspection of St Nicholas School Southend-on-Sea SS2 4RL**

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave to me and my colleague when we visited your school. Thank you for contributing to the inspection by completing your questionnaires, to school council members for meeting with us and to those of you who spoke to us during the inspection. This letter is to let you know what we found.

We are very pleased to tell you that you go to a good school. The teaching you receive is good and you make good progress. Teachers are skilful at checking that you understand your work in lessons but marking doesn't always give you the reminders you need on how to improve. You are taught a good range of subjects and have more qualifications available to you this year. We found that some of you, especially those of you with talents in particular subjects, could learn more in those subjects and take more examinations.

Attendance at your school is average overall but some of you don't come as often as you should. That means you miss out on the good things the school has to offer. Many of you do attend very regularly and benefit from that. Generally you behave well and many of you are caring towards each other. You told us that name calling sometimes happens but that you know to tell staff and that they will sort it out.

You also told us that the school prepares you for the future, helps you to be healthy, that teachers are interested in your views and that the head teacher and senior staff do a good job, and we agree. We saw that your school building is very nice but that some things about your school are a bit young for you. We want your school to get even better and so we have asked your headteacher and the staff to:

- make sure that marking gives you the information you need to improve your work
- give those of you who are ready for it opportunities to learn more quickly and gain more qualifications
- help your families to get involved with what you do at school
- make sure everything about your school is suitable for your age.

You have a role to play too, by working hard and behaving well towards each other.

Yours sincerely

Lucie Calow

Lead Inspector

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