

# St Nicholas' School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	119059
<b>Local Authority</b>	Kent
<b>Inspection number</b>	379718
<b>Inspection dates</b>	5–6 October 2011
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	James Bowden

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>	4–19
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	195
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	31
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	John Greer
<b>Headteacher</b>	Daniel Lewis
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	27–28 April 2009
<b>School address</b>	Holme Oak Close Nunnery Fields Canterbury CT1 3JJ
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<b>Email address</b>	headteacher@st-nicholas.kent.sch.uk

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<b>Age group</b>	4–19
<b>Inspection date(s)</b>	5–6 October 2011
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## Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 15 lessons, seeing 14 teachers. Meetings were held with the headteacher, the senior leadership team, other staff with posts of responsibility and groups of students. In addition, meetings were held with the Chair of the Governing Body and the governor with responsibility for safeguarding. Inspectors observed the school's work, and looked at development plans, curriculum planning, the school's tracking data showing students' progress, teachers' lesson plans and samples of students' work.

Questionnaires returned by 44 parents and carers, 49 students and 74 staff were analysed.

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

- Does the school have a consistent track record of improving students' achievement at the end of Key Stage 4 and at the end of the sixth form?
- Is teaching, including the use of other adult support, sufficiently challenging for students, enabling all groups to learn effectively and make the best progress possible?
- How well is the school using new technologies to support teaching and enliven learning?
- How effective is leadership at all levels, including governance, in moving the school onwards and upwards?

## Information about the school

St Nicholas' is a designated specialist school for pupils and students with profound, severe and complex learning difficulties. Many also have additional difficulties such as physical disabilities, epilepsy, autism and sensory impairment. The number on roll has increased by almost a third since the last inspection. All have a statement of special educational needs. The very large majority of students are White British and come from a variety of communities surrounding Canterbury. There are currently many more boys than girls. Sixteen students are looked after by the local authority and the proportion known to be eligible for free school meals is well above the national average.

There is one small Reception class at the school. Two Year 7 and Year 8 classes spend a proportion of the weekly timetable in local mainstream secondary schools in 'satellite' class bases. As a result of the 'St Nicholas @ Canterbury College' project, all of the 16–19 students are based in a purpose-built teaching block on the Canterbury College campus. The school also offers an outreach service to mainstream schools to support children and young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities. In addition, it manages the Mary Sheridan Unit – an Early Years Foundation Stage educational observation and assessment provision based in the Children's Centre at the Kent and Canterbury hospital. This is not reported on in this inspection.

The school has gained the Artsmark and Healthy Schools status. The St Nicholas' Extended Programme and Services (STEPS) provides a range of activities such as

after-school clubs, holiday schemes and parent/carer workshops in the local community.

**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?**

**3**

**The school's capacity for sustained improvement**

**3**

## Main findings

The overall effectiveness of St Nicholas' School is satisfactory. There are a number of significant strengths but also some weaknesses in planning and governance, because the regular monitoring and review of policies and procedures are insufficiently rigorous. More positively, the school continues to make good provision for pupils and students and they achieve good outcomes. These continuing good outcomes for pupils, along with good teaching and excellent provision within the sixth form and the Early Years Foundation Stage, mean that, despite the weakness, the capacity for improvement in the future is satisfactory.

The school is successful in giving each child a sense of personal value and promoting self-confidence and self-esteem within a secure yet challenging and happy environment. A significant strength of the school is that in the Early Years Foundation Stage and the sixth form outcomes are now excellent. In addition, as a result of its specialism, the school has established excellent partnerships with other schools. The quality of care, guidance and support for students is good. This effectively supports the good, and in some aspects, excellent progress in students' personal development and prepares them well for the next stage of their education. Students' responses to the inspection questionnaire show that the great majority are positive about all aspects of the school's provision. Parents and carers too are appreciative of the school's work. One summed up the typical view noting, 'The school is very effective, helpful and always has my child's best interests at heart. It not only helps my child but also helps me when I need help or advice.'

Students' progress across the main school is good. Good progress is particularly evident in English and mathematics. Teaching is good and offers appropriate challenge. Students' work is assessed carefully and regularly moderated by staff to ensure accuracy. The increased use of signing and other communication aids, including for students with autistic spectrum disorders, underpins the quality of their learning and the good progress they make in lessons.

Overall, leadership and management are satisfactory. Areas for improvement identified at the last inspection have been addressed effectively. However, senior leaders have not given sufficient attention to regular whole-school monitoring and evaluation of strategies and policies. Improvement planning, including success criteria and monitoring arrangements, are not sharply focused. New roles and responsibilities for the extended senior leadership and management team have recently been introduced but the impact of these has yet to be evident. Some leaders

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and managers demonstrate much better practice. For example, leaders of the sixth form and of the Early Years Foundation Stage operate almost independently, and demonstrate excellent leadership and management. The governing body is not proactive in holding the school to account. Policies and procedures are not reviewed regularly to keep pace with developments.

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

- Ensure senior leaders regularly and rigorously monitor and evaluate all the school's key policies and strategies in order to identify and prioritise areas for improvement.
- Create a focused school development plan with clearly identified monitoring arrangements and deadlines.
- Ensure the governing body effectively monitors the work of the school, challenging and holding it fully to account.

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

There are no significant variations between the progress of different groups of students, including boys and girls, those known to be eligible for free school meals and those whose circumstances make them the most vulnerable. In lessons, students, regardless of their needs or backgrounds, consolidate and build on previous learning well and make good progress in new learning. In a structured reading session, students reacted well to the support they were given and improved their individual reading skills and confidence in reading. In a music lesson, students played musical instruments individually, as well as in groups. Their listening, communication and motor skills were practised and reinforced throughout. This was also the case in a communication skills lesson where students applied themselves diligently and happily while improving their signing competencies.

Without exception, all students who completed the inspection questionnaire say that they feel safe at school. This was confirmed further by students and a parent who noted, 'My child has never shown displeasure at coming to school and is happy and safe, which is what I want.' Although there are occasional outbursts, due mainly to frustrations rather than untoward intentions, learning was not interrupted by any disruptive behaviour during the inspection and some students were able to manage their own behaviour with adult support. Their response to the consistent routines used by staff to manage behaviour is good, including at lunchtimes, break times and when moving around the school. Students eat very healthily, take part in a broad range of physical activities with great enjoyment, including swimming, and know the importance of this. Indicative of students' understanding in this respect is the Healthy Schools status. Their physical development improves considerably as a result of the activity-based programme involving teachers, therapists, support staff and families in helping the children to develop basic physical skills such as sitting, standing and walking. Students are involved fully in the life of the school, including putting forward their views through the school council. In addition, they are involved

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in many activities within the local community throughout the year, including in school teams for a range of sports. When they leave the school at the end of Year 11, all students continue into the sixth form or move on to further education or training elsewhere. A range of activities across the year, including those recognised by the Artsmark award, supports pupils' good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

*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>1</b>
<b>Pupils' behaviour</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community</b>	<b>1</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>	2
<b>The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development</b>	<b>2</b>

## How effective is the provision?

Students told inspectors that they enjoy lessons and appreciate the support provided for them by the staff. This is because teachers know the needs of the students well and effectively collaborate, their sensitive interventions helping students stay on task. In a literacy lesson, good planning ensured the work was tailored to individual needs and the students were kept on track by questioning, listening to and closely observing the adults. At the same time, a physiotherapy activity led by an adult supported a pupil in standing and sitting. Praise is used wisely by all adults to encourage perseverance and successful outcomes. On occasions, though, there is a tendency for some adults to join in with activities rather than support students' independent learning. Teachers are adept at using information and communication technology (ICT) to support teaching and enliven learning. Class management is effective because it is consistently calm and students are made fully aware of the school's expectations in this respect. As a result, the great majority of students are

<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.

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keen and ready to learn throughout the day.

The curriculum contributes well to students’ academic progress and personal development, including aspects of their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The full National Curriculum is taught to all and there is good provision for the key skills of literacy, numeracy, ICT and communication, the latter enabling greater access by students to the subjects offered. Throughout the whole year, a broad range of enrichment activities, within the school and beyond, extend students’ learning and develop further their interests and preparation for life beyond the school. The provision for work experience opportunities for older students is improving.

The school has a strong ethos of care and sensitivity to students’ needs. Adults work hard to secure this, helping each individual, including the most vulnerable regardless of background, in very specific ways. A particular strength is the carefully managed programme of reviews, which are highly effective in supporting students on arrival, throughout their time at the school and when they leave. Above average attendance is a result of the school’s procedures for reducing absence. Authorised absence, mainly due to students’ medical needs, is declining and unauthorised absence is currently nil.

*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?

Staff are supportive of the school’s aims and ethos. There is ambition to improve at most levels in the school, and leaders at a range of levels carry out effective work. Individual target setting works well, and the deputy headteachers collect the necessary data to analyse progress. The monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning is embedded well and has ensured that planning for learning is sharper, and the deployment of teaching assistants in lessons more effective, than at the time of the last inspection. However, there is a lack of rigour in self-evaluation and whole-school planning. School improvement relies on the strong work carried out by some individual leaders rather than operating as a coherent programme.

Governance is inadequate. The governing body does not have sufficient impact on the direction of the school and has not provided enough challenge. There is no regular and systematic review of policies and procedures. However, governors have ensured that basic statutory requirements are met, including for safeguarding,



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equalities legislation and for promotion of community cohesion. Risk assessments and child-protection procedures are secure. Curriculum content and enrichment activities support the school’s satisfactory promotion of community cohesion within the school itself, the local community and beyond. The school is very effective in ensuring all students have equality of opportunity. It tackles any discrimination and achieves a successful ethos of inclusion with no underachievement by any group.

The school’s outstanding collaborative working with an extensive range of other professionals and specialist providers extends curriculum opportunities and supports students’ medical and personal needs very well. These partnerships make a very significant contribution to students’ progress, for example in the sixth form. In addition, it has worked hard and successfully to engage parents and carers. Given the outcomes the school achieves, it is providing good value for money.

*These are the grades for leadership and management*

<b>The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement</b>	<b>3</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>4</b>
<b>The effectiveness of the school’s engagement with parents and carers</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being</b>	<b>1</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>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money</b>	<b>2</b>

## Early Years Foundation Stage

At the heart of this outstanding provision are the in-depth initial assessments used to plan individual programmes for the unique challenges facing each child. One parent whose child has just started noted, ‘I am really impressed with the school’s approachable nature, our child has settled well and we are really pleased we chose St Nicholas.’ Children are making excellent progress in learning communication skills and developing their independence. Highly effective and purposeful direction of teaching assistants supports the well-pitched expectations of the teacher. This was clearly evident in an independent play activity and end-of-day routines where all were purposefully involved. High levels of support and care for the individual child, including for their medical needs when appropriate, and a sharp focus on safe practice underpin the all-round outstanding progress children make. The experienced

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leader of the Early Years Foundation Stage is highly effective and has continued to build further on the strengths identified at the previous inspection.

*These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage*

<b>Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage</b>	<b>1</b>
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	1

## Sixth form

Though the base is located some ten minutes walk from the main school, students move seamlessly into the sixth form. It is led and managed highly effectively by the school's 14–19 phase coordinator. Students are very positive about their experiences and, without exception, those who completed the inspection questionnaire felt they were safe at the school and that the school helped them prepare for the future. Students make outstanding academic progress, as well as making great strides in developing their independence and personal attributes. Many gain accreditation at entry-level in English and mathematics as well as other vocational accreditations focusing on life skills. Underpinning this is excellent quality teaching and careful assessment of students' progress, which informs students' personalised learning programmes. In an English lesson, students' confidence grew, as did their interest and thoughtful contributions, when the teacher led them in discussing issues of 'anger' and how these affected people in different ways. Excellent curricular provision is enhanced further by opportunities for work experience and an extensive range of enrichment activities, including residential outdoor and adventurous trips. As a result of strong care, guidance and support, including staff support for individuals, all move on successfully to further education, training or specialist supported-care placements.

*These are the grades for the sixth form*

<b>Overall effectiveness of the sixth form</b>	<b>1</b>
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	1
The quality of provision in the sixth form	1
Leadership and management of the sixth form	1

## Views of parents and carers

The proportion of questionnaires returned was below the national average for special schools. Of those returned, all parents and carers are happy with their child's experience at the school. In addition, all say the school keeps their child safe, informs them about their child's progress and helps their child have a healthy

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lifestyle. This inspection endorses these views. A very small minority feel that their child is not making enough progress at the school and that their child is not well prepared for the future, but inspectors found no evidence to support this for the students as a whole.

### 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 44 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 195 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	32	73	11	25	1	2	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	33	75	11	25	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child’s progress	30	68	14	32	0	0	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	20	45	17	39	4	9	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	26	59	14	32	2	5	0	0
The school helps me to support my child’s learning	24	55	16	36	2	5	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	26	59	18	41	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)	27	61	12	27	3	7	0	0
The school meets my child’s particular needs	23	52	16	36	2	5	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	22	50	17	39	0	0	1	2
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	28	64	11	25	1	2	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	28	64	13	30	1	2	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child’s experience at this school	30	68	11	25	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	43	47	10	0
Primary schools	6	46	42	6
Secondary schools	14	36	41	9
Sixth forms	15	42	41	3
Special schools	30	48	19	3
Pupil referral units	14	50	31	5
All schools	10	44	39	6

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 08 April 2011 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.**



15 October 2011

Dear Children, Pupils and Students

### **Inspection of St Nicholas' School, Canterbury CT1 3JJ**

Not so long ago, three of us came to your school to see how well you are getting on. We also wanted to know whether we could suggest anything to make things even better for you. We enjoyed our time at the school and meeting you in lessons and around the school. Your responses to the Ofsted questionnaire showed that all of you feel safe when at school and that the school helps prepare you for the future. We agree, and can see why. However, the people who run the school are not checking carefully enough on what it is doing. Even though there are many positives it is because of this that we have said the school is satisfactory.

These are some of the good things we found.

- The staff care for you and have your best interests at heart.
- You all make good progress in your academic and personal development.
- In the Reception class and the sixth form, you make excellent progress.
- Your behaviour is good and you get along well with one another.
- In lessons, teachers and other adults give you lots of help and support.
- There are lots of interesting and enjoyable things for you to do.
- The school works really well with lots of other people, including your parents and carers, to help you.

These are the things that we have asked your school to do so that it will improve:

- make sure the school leaders make careful checks on what it is doing
- make sure they make detailed plans to improve
- make sure the school's governors improve the way they are involved.

All of you too can help by continuing to work hard. Many thanks for letting us see what you were learning in school during our visit.

Yours sincerely

James Bowden  
Lead inspector

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