

Fred Nicholson School

Inspection report

Unique reference number	121256
Local authority	Norfolk
Inspection number	380192
Inspection dates	4–5 July 2012
Lead inspector	Susan Lewis

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

The inspection of residential provision was carried out under the Children Act 1989, as amended by the Care Standards Act 2000, having regard to the national minimum standards for residential special schools.

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	3–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	105
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	2
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Louise Reeves
Headteacher	Alison Kahn
Date of previous school inspection	27 January 2009
School address	Westfield Road Dereham NR19 1JB
Telephone number	01362 693915
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Residential provision	Fred Nicholson School
Social care unique reference number	SC038284
Social care inspector	Stephen Halliley

Age group	3–19
Inspection date(s)	4–5 July 2012
Inspection number	380192



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Introduction

Inspection team

Susan Lewis	Additional Inspector
Joanna Jones	Additional Inspector
Stephen Halliley	Social Care Inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Inspectors visited 21 lessons taught by 17 teachers and higher-level teaching assistants. They observed the school's work, including its residential provision, and scrutinised the school's development plans. Inspectors had discussions with governors, groups of pupils, individual parents and carers, partner agencies such as social care professionals, the school staff and its leaders and managers. They looked at information about pupils' progress and the procedures to ensure that pupils are safe. They examined 22 questionnaires returned from parents and carers, 105 from pupils and 27 from staff.

Information about the school

Fred Nicholson is an average-sized residential special school. At the time of the last inspection it was designated for pupils aged seven to 16 years who had moderate learning difficulties. In January 2010 the school was re-designated as a school for pupils aged three to 19 years who have complex learning needs. It has not yet expanded to take the full age group as it is waiting for the school's accommodation to be adapted. At the time of this inspection pupils were aged eight to 17 years. The two oldest students are taught within the Key Stage 4 provision because of their particular needs. The school has an increasing proportion of pupils with more severe learning and complex needs. These include about 40% of pupils who have behavioral, emotional and social difficulties. A similar proportion is identified as having autism. Many pupils have two or more types of disability or need. The school also manages a specialist resourced provision, Orchard House. This caters for pupils with autistic spectrum disorders.

The residential provision provides for up to 26 pupils, usually for two or three nights at a time. In 2010 the school attained specialist status and the Investors in Families award. The work of Orchard House is accredited by the National Autistic Society.

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	2
Achievement of pupils	2
Quality of teaching	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	1
Leadership and management	2

Key findings

- This is a good school, which is improving well. It is not yet outstanding because teaching, though good overall, has some inconsistencies, particularly in the ways pupils' literacy skills are supported in all subjects. In writing, staff do not always make use of the full range of available resources and aids to support pupils in improving their skills. The school is meticulous in monitoring pupils' progress to ensure every child has the opportunity to succeed. It has particular strengths in helping pupils to manage their behaviour so that pupils' behaviour is outstanding.
- Achievement is good overall for all groups of pupils, including those with complex needs. There are particular strengths in pupils' progress in their communication, speaking and listening, reading and independent living skills and their ability to work with others. The specialist provision in Orchard House enhances the expertise available to all pupils within the school and these pupils make outstanding progress.
- The residential provision is outstanding and makes an outstanding contribution to pupils' personal development and their achievement and progress in school. This is because the school and residential staff work so well together to ensure pupils feel very safe, understand their targets and the many opportunities pupils have to take part in clubs and outings are all focused on helping them to try out new skills and enjoy being with others. Although a relatively minor issue, the staff handbook does not make it clear that staff can discuss any incident involving physical intervention they are involved in with a relevant adult.
- Teaching is effective because staff know each pupil's needs very well. Lessons are usually very well targeted on next steps in their learning. All staff are expert in behaviour management and understand the challenges that pupils with autism might have, but also the ways in which the curriculum can be used to enthuse pupils. Occasionally lessons, though enjoyable, do not challenge all

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pupils sufficiently, because adults are too quick to supply answers or pupils do not have enough opportunities or ways to record their work for themselves.

- Leadership and management, including the leadership of teaching and the management of performance, are good. Some aspects, such as the shared ambition and vision and the leadership of the residential and specialist provisions, are excellent. Leaders have created a very positive ethos for learning.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise the quality of teaching from good to outstanding by:
 - ensuring the pace and challenge is appropriate for all pupils whatever their ability and needs in all parts of lessons
 - providing more planned opportunities for pupils to apply their literacy skills in different contexts and in different subjects
 - using the available teaching assistant support and other resources, including technology, more consistently and effectively in every part of a lesson to enhance pupils' learning and involvement and promote their independent learning.
- Improve progress in writing by providing more opportunities and more varied ways for pupils to record their ideas.
- Ensure that the staff handbook makes it clear that staff have the opportunity to discuss any physical intervention they are involved in with a relevant adult.

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Main report

Achievement of pupils

The school's data demonstrate that the vast majority of pupils make good progress during their time at the school from very low starting points on entry. Inspectors' observations confirmed particularly good progress in areas such as art and reading, with outstanding progress in communication, speaking and listening and personal, social and emotional development. The school is skilled at identifying relevant qualifications for each pupil and is extending these further. For example, older students will take GCSE science next year and a few students achieve the lower levels in GCSE mathematics and art and occasionally other subjects each year. Although the attainment of pupils in Year 6 is below that for all pupils nationally, the gap is narrowing because pupils' progress is strongly promoted. Pupils make such sustained progress because the school now assesses and plans their next steps very carefully with them, their families and the residential staff, and ensures that everyone works together towards achieving them.

Pupils say that because their lessons are interesting they are 'learning lots'. They also make outstanding progress in their concentration and work with others, aspects they often find challenging. This prepares them very well for the next stage in their education. The recent changes in approaches to teaching the sounds that letters make and the continued support for reading throughout the school enable pupils to make good progress in their reading. Teachers and support assistants provide systematic support for these skills, which are reinforced extremely well in the residence. However, writing is less systematically supported in subjects other than English. Although progress in writing is satisfactory overall, there are insufficient opportunities for pupils to practise their skills in a range of contexts, or through the use of technology and other resources.

Skills for independent learning and living are very well supported in school and in the residence. Parents and carers are particularly appreciative of the academic progress pupils make as well as their social and emotional development and how they manage their behaviour.

Quality of teaching

Good teaching promotes good learning and progress throughout the school. The teaching in almost all lessons observed was good and occasionally outstanding. Pupils themselves say how much they like their teachers and feel they help them to learn. Parents and carers uniformly consider the teaching to be good and that their children's needs are catered for. Staff generally work well together in a mixture of whole-class, group and individual lessons. This includes consistent support for pupils' social, emotional and behavioural needs and giving pupils the mutual respect they expect them to show each other. Pupils quickly understand and respond favourably

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to the high expectations that staff have of their behaviour. Group work usually ensures that activities are closely matched to pupils' needs and that pupils are mostly challenged well. However, sometimes teachers and teaching assistants are too quick to provide answers or the task itself does not provide sufficient challenge for the pupils to think and work independently. Occasionally, in the whole class part of a lesson, there is not a clear role for the teaching assistants and learning slows. Most teachers assess well how pupils are moving towards their targets and encourage pupils to assess this too, sharing lesson objectives with them.

Learning is most effective when there is a practical element to the lesson in which pupils have to discover or apply new skills. This was particularly evident in the many different experiences provided through the school's Olympic theme. Pupils designed new sports kits or a new logo for the Olympics and in the most effective lessons were very well supported to use their reading and mathematical skills to think of an original way of doing this. Although pupils on entry may have few skills in working with others, as they progress through the school they become excellent team players because teachers plan group work carefully and set targets for such work in ways that pupils clearly understand.

An individual approach to the pupils' needs ensures that they receive consistent messages about expectations and understand how well they are doing. Teaching promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development extremely well. The youngest pupils joined in with pride, for example, in a story in assembly about persevering, older ones cheered each other on and celebrated in their Olympic Games, whether someone came last or first in a race. They 'glow' when praised for their reading or the support they give each other and are proud to be part of the school council, feeling they really make a difference to the school.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Behaviour is outstanding in both the residence and the school. The school meticulously records any incidents. Pupils' behaviour improves because they quickly learn to trust staff. They say they feel listened to and that their views are treated with respect. Records show that exclusions are rare and the number of serious incidents decreases significantly in line with the length of time pupils spend at the school. Often pupils have not attended school regularly before they join and, despite difficulties in the past, most quickly improve their attendance. For some this remains a challenge because of their medical and learning needs, but the school works extremely well with parents and carers and others to improve attendance.

Pupils' safety is rigorously promoted in school and the residence and is outstanding. Excellent personal, social and health education programmes, including independence programmes and life and living skills, ensure that pupils develop a very strong awareness of how to keep themselves safe and healthy. They understand for example road safety, that they must be careful when using the internet and should not talk too readily to strangers. The very positive feedback from parents and carers and from social workers reflects the excellent ways in which school and residential

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staff care for the pupils. Pupils say they feel very safe and that they know that staff will sort out any incidents that do occur. They say 'we all get on' and neither they nor their parents and carers feel that bullying of any kind is an issue.

The school has excellent partnerships with a range of outside agencies and professionals and with families; these encourage good behaviour, continuity of care and positive learning attitudes. Careful risk assessments are made and the detailed tracking of pupils' behavioural and other targets mean all staff know pupils very well.

Leadership and management

The driving ambition that everyone within the school and the residence has for its pupils is palpable and a number of recent initiatives such as the restructuring of the leadership team and the revising of the curriculum reflect this. The more 'creative' curriculum is exciting pupils and staff and offers a broader range of courses and approaches to meet pupils' changing needs. The roles and responsibilities of middle managers are being developed and they fulfil these well, though some are relatively new to their posts. These changes are part of the leadership's planned and determined journey towards excellence at every level. Leaders know exactly what now needs to be done and the school is well set up to improve further.

The school fulfils its responsibilities under the Equality Act, carefully examining all aspects of the environment and the school's work to make sure all have the opportunities they should. Data are rigorously analysed and interventions put into place if any group or individual is at risk of falling behind. The leadership of teaching and learning are good. Careful use of professional development and of performance management targets ensure that staff understand the challenges faced by the pupils in their class.

Members of the governing body are very well informed and active in planning for the school's future and their areas of expertise are used well. The broad and relevant curriculum is rapidly improving because it is highly focused on pupils' needs and prepares them extremely well for the next stage in their education. It draws on the local community very well, for example through work experience and work-related learning. It also provides enrichment activities such as a visit to China and contacts with other schools that really enable pupils to reflect on their own and others' needs and be part of a team and a group. It, therefore, promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development extremely well.

Safeguarding procedures are robust and meet all current government requirements. They are regularly reviewed and pupils' wellbeing is at the centre of all of the school's practice. Staff training is thorough and risk assessments detailed for both residential and school situations.

The leadership and management of the residential provision are outstanding. The one recommendation made at the last inspection has been met and the school continues to improve its residential provision. The provision is very carefully held to account by the senior leadership team and governing body.

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Residential provision

The outstanding residential provision helps pupils to succeed as well as providing them with a highly enjoyable social stay. Pupils make outstanding personal progress from their starting points in areas such as their behaviour, self esteem, independence skills and their willingness to work with others. Staff are very experienced and highly motivated. They are extremely knowledgeable about how to support pupils with the complexity of needs in the school. Detailed assessment and monitoring complements that of the school and this ensures that pupils make excellent progress towards their personal targets and those set within their reviews. Pupils are clear that they all 'have a voice' and feel valued and listened to. They make huge growth in their self-confidence, the management of their behaviour and in their awareness of how to work and relate to others. This is because the close working with school and the sharing of approaches and of targets secures consistency of care and messages to pupils. Pupils' suggestions for improvement are taken very seriously and acted upon, whether these are about possible activities or their own targets. All this means that pupils improve measurably in their attitudes, sense of responsibility, self-esteem and behaviour, as well as contributing to their academic studies.

National minimum standards

The school meets the national minimum standards for residential special schools.

These are the grades for the residential provision

Overall effectiveness of the residential experience	1
Outcomes for residential pupils	1
Quality of residential provision and care	1
Residential pupils' safety	1
Leadership and management of the residential provision	1

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	54	42	2	2
Primary schools	14	49	32	6
Secondary schools	20	39	34	7
Special schools	33	45	20	3
Pupil referral units	9	55	28	8
All schools	16	47	31	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 to 31 December 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.
Floor standards:	the national minimum expectation of attainment and progression measures.
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.



6 July 2012

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Fred Nicholson School, Dereham, NR19 1JB

We did enjoy visiting your school and the residential provision recently and watching you work. Thank you for being so welcoming. We enjoyed talking to you. Thank you particularly to those of you who read to us, showed us your work and filled in the questionnaires. Thank you, too, to the school council members for telling us about what you do and sharing your views of the school. It was good to hear how much you like your school and your teachers. We found that your school is a good school and some things are improving quickly. This is because the governing body, your headteacher and staff check very carefully on how well you are learning.

- You like the different topics you study and are proud of how well you are learning to read.
- Your behaviour is outstanding because the teachers help you to manage it and to consider others' needs well, even when you are feeling cross about something.
- You know that if anyone does misbehave or is unkind, your teachers or the headteacher will sort it out.
- You make excellent progress in the ways you listen in lessons and in your speaking because the school works hard to give you lots of opportunities to use these skills.

For the school to become even better we have asked your headteacher and the governing body to:

- make the teaching even better by making sure the work you do in all the different parts of lessons is always at the right level for each of you
- make sure that in the different subjects you study you have more opportunities to write including using computers and other aids to help you.

You can help too by continuing to behave so well and by trying to come to school every day, unless you are ill.

Yours sincerely

Susan Lewis
Lead Inspector

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