

St Nicholas Special School

Welfare inspection report for a residential special school

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Inspector Liz Driver

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Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection 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, in order to assure children and young people, parents, the public, local authorities and government of the quality and standard of the service provided.^{1,2}

Information about the school

St Nicholas School is a maintained residential school for 60 boys aged between 11 and 16 years. Up to 24 boys can reside at the school during the week, between one and four nights. The residential accommodation is provided in one unit located in the main body of the school.

The school is situated in Merstham, Surrey and caters for boys who have a primary need in relation to their emotional and behavioural difficulties. Additional needs such as language difficulties or health conditions may also have an impact on their learning potential. The residential provision was last inspected in September 2011.

¹ www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1989/41/contents.

² www.education.gov.uk/schools/leadership/typesofschools/a00192112/boarding-schools.

Inspection judgements

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

Overall effectiveness

The key findings of the residential inspection are as follows.

- Residential pupils benefit significantly from their residential experience and highly individualised care that includes a therapeutic element.
- The impact of boarding has a strong connection to the quality of care and the personal development and well being of all residential pupils at the school. Many exceed their potential; specifically around their behaviour management and social skills.
- The school safeguards its residential pupils effectively and to a high standard. Safeguarding and protection is a high priority for all staff. Residential pupils are kept as safe as possible through effective policies and procedures and competently trained staff whose main focus is always on the safety of pupils.
- The leadership and management of the setting is extremely strong and effective. Skilled and proficient senior staff support and guide an experienced, skilful and stable staff team who provide high quality care enabling residential pupils to make excellent progress.
- Positive, sensitive and nurturing relationships with experienced, committed and well-trained staff enable residential pupils to trust adults who care for them.
- Residential pupils engage in a wide range of outdoor and indoor activities which allow them to develop individual interests and improve their self-esteem.
- Close and highly effective liaison between the care and education staff promotes a shared understanding of residential pupils needs and provides a consistent approach to learning across the 24 hour day.
- The school works with a clear purpose; with passion to make a difference, to

help young people believe in themselves, to celebrate success and treat residential pupils as equals. Staff have strong ambitions and strong expectations for the pupils in their care.

- Residential pupils are happy at the school, they enjoy the staff's company and are insightful of the progress they have made.
- Exceptionally good feedback from parents and carers covers all aspects of the residential provision.
- All national minimum standards are met. There are no recommendations made.

Outcomes for residential pupils

Outcomes for residential pupils are outstanding. Residential pupils benefit significantly from their residential experience and highly individualised care that includes therapeutic elements. Sensitive, positive and nurturing relationships with staff help them to develop trust in the adults who care for them. Residential pupils report that they can approach any of the care staff if they are anxious, worried or upset.

Residential pupils are encouraged and guided to be aspirational and to feel good about themselves. This ethos is embedded throughout the whole school and pupils are achieving beyond their own expectations. Residential pupils respond very well within an environment which is rich in rewards, while quick to implement behavioural boundaries when this becomes necessary. Residential pupils respond exceptionally well to the clear and consistent messages they receive from a staff team they respect. As a result, they develop emotionally, socially and academically.

Parents very positively confirm the progress their children have made since being at the school, with comments such as; 'my son has improved greatly, he has calmed down', 'he loves it at the school', 'I am so happy my son is at this school', 'my son has made excellent all round progress', 'I am 100% happy with the school and what they do for my son' and 'the change in my son is hugely positive'.

Residential pupils state that they are pleased that staff help them with their behaviour management. Some stated 'it's the best school ever'. Others stated 'I am pleased staff have helped me with my temper' and 'it's a brilliant school'.

Residential pupils contribute to the development of residential provision through informal discussion with staff and the very active school forum. Every pupil is offered suitable support to voice their views and opinions. As a result, they feel fully integrated into the residential life.

Residential pupils enjoy excellent relationships with the staff. This is a real strength of the school. The residential accommodation is a warm and friendly environment with a relaxed and calming atmosphere. Their residential time is structured, packed

with a range of activities and staffed by a stable, highly competent and skilful staff team. Positive behaviour is richly rewarded and staff are very good at recognising triggers. They are quick to de-escalate situations because they know the pupils exceptionally well.

Residential pupils thoroughly enjoy a wide range of stimulating experiences and opportunities that may stretch their abilities. They are supported to engage in activities. A real strength of the school is the way in which they are committed in integrating into the local community and also bringing the community into the school. For example, a firework evening is planned, to which the local community have been invited.

Residential pupils are supported to develop independence skills at an appropriate level, with many exceeding their potential. For some pupils, it may be learning socially acceptable behaviours and for others learning how to budget, shop and cook a meal. Excellent liaison with local businesses, the Connexions service and representatives of the community provides meaningful work experience placements for older pupils.

Residential pupils receive excellent care when they are ill. The school is explicitly clear about parental responsibility in this regard.

Quality of residential provision and care

The quality of the residential provision is outstanding. Committed and motivated residential staff provide consistent, high quality care. Highly effective and cohesive links between the residential staff and academic staff provide pupils with individual support tailored to their needs and help to address any issues promptly. As a result, care is seamless and holistic. The residential provision is fully supported by the teaching staff and governing body. Collaborative working in the pupils' best interests is a particular strength of the school.

Purposeful, enjoyable activities are a key feature of the overall provision. Residential pupils participate in a range of activities they have helped to choose. Through these activities, they learn how to integrate into the local community and increase their self-esteem and self-confidence.

All residential pupils are able to register with a local doctor and a school nurse visits regularly. Staff ensure that residential pupils attend regular health appointments. They work closely with parents and carers to ensure that the school is meeting all their health needs. There is a highly robust system for administering medication, ensuring that residential pupils receive their prescribed medication safely. When a pupil is unwell, the school monitors their health closely. Their emotional health and well-being has a high priority and as a result, this allows them to feel valued and cared for.

The catering arrangements in the school are very good. Residential pupils receive meals that are well balanced and cater for personal preferences, cultural needs and identified medical requirements. Pupils may also help to shop for provisions and prepare meals as part of their social and independence training.

Residential pupils said that the food is always good and they have plenty of choice. Meals are well-presented and plentiful. Meal times are well-ordered social occasions with staff supervising individual needs and preferences. The school's catering arrangements meet the standards of the local environmental health department, having received the highest rating at the last inspection.

Residential pupils live in a safe and very well-maintained environment. Communal areas are decorated and furnished to an exceptionally high standard. They are homely, comfortable and extremely well equipped. All areas are 'pupil-centred' with a wealth of pictures, posters and photos displayed. Individual or shared bedrooms are well maintained and personalised. Toilet and bathing facilities are of an excellent standard and afford suitable privacy.

Telephones and computers are situated so as to promote private use alongside ensuring appropriate safeguards, such as restricted access to certain websites and discreet supervision. Residential pupils confirm they can easily contact their friends and relatives while at school. The school grounds are spacious and well maintained. Residential pupils said they enjoy living in the residential unit.

Residential pupils' safety

The school's provision to safeguard residential pupils is outstanding. The school responds extremely well to the high level of challenging behaviours and vulnerabilities residential pupils present with; ensuring their protection is a priority.

Clear policies and procedures, up-to-date training and fully supported staff result in overall excellent safeguarding measures. The staff team have the experience, knowledge and confidence to deal with problems as they arise.

Highly experienced members of the senior leadership team share and communicate closely about child protection issues. The head teacher and head of care carry the lead in child protection. The school has excellent links with Local Authority Designated Officers and shares information effectively to protect pupils.

Residential pupils say they feel safe; one learner said 'I feel safe here and can tell staff all my worries'. The open and trusting relationships with staff result in any concerns being identified early and referred on to the appropriate agencies. The staff team are very well-informed about the appropriate safe management of some very challenging behaviours. The residential pupils do not report bullying as an issue and stated that staff act quickly if there is any concern. In general, difference is accepted and respected.

Well-organised and robust records evidence excellent recruitment practices. This safeguards residential pupils from potentially unsuitable people working within the school and residential provision. All visitors are highly vetted and supervised.

Residential pupils feel secure and comfortable living in age and single gender-related groups. A real strength of the school is the behaviour management systems and the continued commitment to reviewing and implementing new ideas that result in improved outcomes for pupils. Residential pupils quickly respond to a pro-active approach which rewards positive conduct. Clear behaviour management plans are individually tailored so that residential pupils receive the support and guidance they need. Staff anticipate difficult situations and are very good at de-escalating them, with physical intervention used only as a last resort. They also place an appropriate amount of responsibility upon individuals to start to manage their own behaviour and to keep themselves safe. Residential pupils confirm this by saying 'I know my behaviour is better now and I know what the consequences are if I lose my temper'.

Detailed records of interventions include the opportunity for residential pupils to reflect with staff what happened if appropriate. Comments such as, 'when I was restrained last evening, I talked it through with my key-worker and I now know why it happened.' All records are highly scrutinised by senior staff to ensure safe practice.

The school's 'nurture' room, which primarily focuses on reducing anxieties and achieving positive inclusion in the classroom, has seen excellent results. One learner said 'the nurture room makes me happy.'

Staff address all aspects of risk comprehensively. However, risk assessments do not limit learners from engaging fully in activities and pursuits and highlight a positive risk-aware approach. Overall, this school is a very safe community for residential pupils to live in. Residential pupils are educated what to do if a fire occurred with regular fire evacuation drills at varying times.

Leadership and management of the residential provision

The leadership and management of the residential provision are outstanding. Residential pupils benefit from an impressively strong and highly effective leadership team. All senior managers work seamlessly to ensure that the school continues to move forward and continues to improve.

There is wealth of information available to residential pupils and parents/carers that covers all aspects of the residential provision. Regular newsletters also keep parents/carers up to date and celebrate achievements.

The staffing levels reflect the complex and challenging needs residential pupils have. All staff receive regular high standard supervision. This promotes the continuing professional development of staff, who are positive in gaining and accessing courses

and qualifications relevant to their roles.

Excellent communication exists between residential and teaching staff, resulting in effective and consistent sharing of information.

Managers and staff get to know residential pupils extremely well as individuals, enabling them to identify and meet the complex and challenging needs of pupils. Knowledge of each residential pupil's family background including their culture, faith or religion is enhanced by excellent relationships with parents and placing authorities. Relationships with the local community continue to improve.

High quality and effective monitoring is another strength of the school. The governors receive regular reports on how the school is operating, with specific reference to the residential side.

All national minimum standards are met with the vast majority being exceeded. The leadership and management team and governors continue to work towards improved quality of care, enhanced safeguarding and better outcomes for pupils.

National minimum standards

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

What should the school do to improve further?

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.



06/11/2012

Inspection of St Nicholas Special School

Dear residential pupils,

I would like to say a big thank you for making me feel so welcome when I visited your school. It was good to spend time with you and find out what boarding life is like for you at St Nicholas school.

I was particularly pleased to hear all the positive comments you made about how much the staff team help you improve your behaviours. I know at times things can be difficult but I also know staff really try their best to help you manage your feelings and behaviours.

Your accommodation is of the highest quality. It was good to see that you respect the accommodation.

The staff team are qualified and experienced to care for you. It was great to see the excellent relationships you have with the staff. All staff have been vetted to ensure they are safe to work with you. They do regular training to ensure they are up to date with practices such as physical interventions (restraints).

It is important for me to know that you have adults you can talk to if you have any worries or concerns and that you enjoy a wide range of activities after school. Staff really enjoy the time they spend with you.

Overall, you attend an excellent school that has excellent residential provision. The head teacher and his staff team work extremely hard to ensure you receive the best care and guidance.

I wish you all continued progress,

Thank you once again,

Liz

Ofsted inspector.

Yours sincerely,

Liz Driver