

St Nicholas School

Taynton Drive, Merstham, Surrey, RH1 3PU

Inspection dates 11–12 September 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of students		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of students		Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Good	2
Overall effectiveness of the residential experience		Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings for parents and students

This is a good school.

- Inspirational leadership by the headteacher has led to many improvements since the last inspection, including in achievement, teaching, behaviour and attendance.
- Most students make at least good progress from very low starting points, especially in reading and writing. Residential students make even better progress in English because care staff supervise homework outstandingly well and encourage reading for pleasure.
- Students settle quickly and make rapid progress in managing their own behaviour. They become mature, polite, respectful and welcoming young people. Over time they develop excellent attitudes to learning.
- Although there have been recruitment difficulties, the support and guidance offered to new teachers mean that the quality of teaching is consistently good.
- Leaders and managers, including governors, have high expectations for the school and lead by example. Parents and carers, staff and students think very highly of them.
- The overall effectiveness of the residential provision is outstanding. The excellent support and guidance offered to students mean that they make rapid progress in their behaviour, achievement and social skills.
- The school meets the national minimum standards for residential special schools.

It is not yet an outstanding school because:

- Progress in mathematics is not as strong as in English. Students are not always given the opportunity to practise their skills in a range of situations or in problem solving activities.
- Not enough teaching is outstanding. Teachers do not always give precise information about how students can improve their work.

Information about this inspection

- This inspection was carried out by two inspectors. The residential provision was inspected at the same time as the school inspection.
- Eleven lessons were observed with senior school staff.
- Inspectors listened to students read and looked at their work, both in lessons and in books from the previous year.
- Meetings were held with various members of staff including leaders and managers, residential staff, a member of the governing body and students. The lead inspector also met with a representative from the local authority.
- Inspectors took account of Parent View, an online survey of parents' and carers' views. They also looked at the school's own survey and met with parents and carers during the inspection.
- All documents relating to boarding were checked. The inspectors also looked at information about students' progress, teaching and planning documentation. The school's documents on safeguarding were scrutinised together with records of attendance and students' behaviour.

Inspection team

Helen Howard, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Janet Humman

Social Care Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- St Nicholas is a school for boys aged 11 to 16 who have behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. Many also have moderate learning difficulties or autistic spectrum disorders. All students have a statement of special educational needs. The school offers weekly residential places for 24 students in addition to day places.
- Approximately three quarters of the students are known to be eligible for the pupil premium (additional government funding for students who are eligible for free school meals, pupils from service families, and those in care), which is well above the national average. Most students have White British backgrounds.
- Students often join school at different ages and times of the year. Many of them may have been out of school for some time.
- Some Key Stage 4 students attend college or vocational placements part time. These are held at East Surrey College, the Skills and Integrated Learning Centre, The Motor Vehicle Training School and the Redhill Training Academy. The school does not enter students early for examinations.
- Due to recruitment difficulties, a high number of staff have joined the school in the last two years.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise attainment, especially in mathematics by:
 - giving students more opportunities to use their skills in a range of different activities
 - making sure that students use their mathematics skills to solve problems.
- Improve teaching so that more is outstanding by ensuring that teachers always let students know precisely what they can do to improve their work.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of students is good

- Many students start school with very low attainment as a result of their learning difficulties or because they have missed schooling. They settle well and, as a result of the good support from adults, quickly re-engage with their learning.
- Systems and routines for learning are well established throughout the school. Together with adults' high expectations, these help students to make good progress relative to their starting points.
- The school's own survey shows that almost all parents and carers agree that their child makes good progress. Students also say that they are doing 'really well' at this school and that this is because teachers know how to help them.
- Most students have very weak literacy skills. Some join the school unable to read or write. The school takes every opportunity to encourage students' love of reading and to practise the skills they are learning. In a Key Stage 3 assembly for example, students were encouraged to read information aloud from a presentation.
- In lessons, students become increasingly confident because adults celebrate every small step of progress in developing writing and reading skills. The programme to support students individually enables them to make rapid gains in reading. Residential staff support literacy homework tasks and encourage reading in the 'book corner'. As a result, residential students make even better progress in English than non-residential students. Although attainment in reading and writing remains low at the end of Key Stage 4, students make good and sometimes outstanding progress from their starting points.
- Some students have additional communication difficulties, especially in their comprehension skills. Adults are skilful in adapting how they give instructions so that students can complete work. They make good progress as a result.
- Many of the students are known to be eligible for pupil premium funding. Through the additional support they are given, these students make the same good progress as those who are not eligible. As a result there is no difference in attainment between these students. The small numbers of students who have a minority ethnic heritage also make good progress. The school promotes equal opportunities exceptionally well.
- In Key Stage 4, the wide range of academic and vocational courses and qualifications offered is matched very carefully to each student's needs. In Year 11 in 2013 for example, the range of qualifications gained included GCSE mathematics and art, Entry levels in a broad range of subjects and Functional Skills. The school rigorously monitors progress in all off-site placements. Students make good progress from their starting points and are very well prepared for their next stage of education. For example, students have the opportunity to try different courses at the local college in order to make informed choices about what to choose after leaving school.
- While good, progress in mathematics is slower than in English. This is because students do not have enough opportunities to practise their skills in a range of different situations or in problem solving activities.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teachers know students very well and plan carefully to meet the needs of students with different abilities. They help students to learn in small steps, which enables them to make good progress.
- Teachers use data about students' progress and their assessment during lessons to adapt tasks when necessary. They regularly mark work with comments that show students what they have done well. In a Year 7 class, this is matched to a progress chart that students can fill in, together with very clear comments about how to improve work. Students respond well as it helps them to understand exactly what they need to do. However, this approach has not been established well

enough in most lessons, resulting in some students making slower progress.

- Teachers and teaching assistants work well together to provide a supportive environment for students in lessons. For example, in a Year 8 English lesson, the teaching assistant regularly informed the teacher about the progress that one student was making in managing his own behaviour. This kept the student focused on his work as both adults celebrated how well he was doing. Adults use effective questioning and thinking time to help students to work things out for themselves. In a Year 7 mathematics lesson on sequencing for example, the teacher asked questions about patterns of blocks set out in a row. Students were able to spot the sequence and write a rule for the pattern.
- Students say that lessons are fun. In most, there is a range of activities and resources to support learning. Teachers are skilful at planning tasks that allow younger students to move regularly and the pace of most lessons is brisk. In the nurture group, which supports some of the most vulnerable students in Key Stage 3, there is a good balance of play and teacher-led activities. This develops students' social and emotional skills and, in particular, their ability to manage a classroom setting.
- The school has introduced a primary style curriculum for students in Key Stage 3. Students are mostly taught by one teacher with some specialist teaching for subjects such as science and physical education. This has had a very positive impact on behaviour and achievement. Students have less time to move around the school in between lessons. They are able to build strong relationships with their class teacher and teaching assistants and this has already resulted in faster progress.

The behaviour and safety of students are outstanding

- Students' behaviour is exemplary in lessons and this makes an excellent contribution to their learning. They thoroughly enjoy coming to school and the high levels of adult supervision ensure that they feel safe at all times.
- Behaviour is equally exceptional outside lessons and in the boarding unit. Adults have very high expectations of behaviour and are excellent role models for the students. There is a strong culture of respect for others and this is demonstrated by the positive relationships that are built.
- Students are polite and friendly and they greet visitors warmly. They are confident in expressing their opinions and appreciate that adults listen to them. The 'Boarders Forum', a regular meeting between adults and students, enables residential students to put forward suggestions and they say that staff take their views seriously.
- The school's reward system encourages students to strive for the privileges that go with it. They become increasingly independent as they move through the school. A fully resourced independence flat, separate from the main residential accommodation, allows residential students to experience the reality of living without continuous support. This prepares them very well for their life beyond school.
- Behaviour plans are used very effectively to set targets for students and to reward progress. Communication between boarding and school staff is excellent and results in a consistent approach to each student.
- Parents and carers are very positive about improvements their child has made with behaviour. As one parent or carer wrote, 'We would not have survived as a family if it wasn't for this school.'
- Students are knowledgeable about bullying and the different forms it may take. They say that it rarely happens but that when it does, the school deals with it very firmly. Students speak warmly of their 'trusted adults' and are confident that they can report any concerns to them. The school tackles discrimination very effectively.
- There is a strong emphasis in the school on keeping safe, including on the internet. This is reinforced in personal and social education lessons and in assemblies. The school is rigorous in its procedures for health and safety and makes detailed risk assessments of all activities off site.
- Attendance, which was an area for improvement in the last inspection, has risen rapidly and is

now closer to national averages. This is the result of the renewed focus by the school and the appointment of an attendance coordinator, funded through pupil premium grants.

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher is an exceptional leader who is constantly looking at ways to improve the well-being of students. He is very well supported by strong senior leaders and by the effective governing body. Senior leaders are highly visible about the school and are seen as very supportive by staff and students. The residential facility is very well managed. A highly effective head of boarding ensures the residential provision is an integral part of the school.
- Together, leaders and managers have developed high expectations of staff and students. As a result, achievement, attendance and behaviour have all improved since the last inspection. These shared expectations demonstrate a strong capacity for further improvements.
- Performance management of teachers is strong and linked to teaching standards. It is a reflection of the senior leaders' effectiveness that the quality of teaching has remained consistently good despite very challenging recruitment difficulties. Staff speak highly of the effective induction programme for new staff. A combination of external support, mentoring by senior leaders and school training programmes, has enabled teachers to improve quickly.
- The school develops its own leaders and this is overcoming some of the recruitment challenges. Other leaders and managers, who are subject leaders or have posts of responsibility, are well supported by senior leaders and are becoming increasingly confident in their role.
- The school develops very effective relationships with parents and carers. As one parent or carer said, 'I know how well my son has done before he gets home.' Many parents and carers speak about how approachable staff are. Communication between care staff and parents and carers is outstanding.
- The curriculum is well planned to meet every student's needs with a focus on developing numeracy and literacy skills in Key Stage 3. In Key Stage 4, a broad range of academic and vocational subjects is taught in school and in local college or training centres. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness is developed well in a range of lessons and activities.
- The local authority provides light touch support to this good school. External consultants have effectively supported the school to improve the quality of teaching and to analyse data.
- Leadership and management are not yet outstanding because middle leaders and managers are not yet fully responsible for monitoring the work of the school.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors challenge and support the school well as a result of effective training and their own broad experience. They regularly visit the school and monitor its work. They have a good knowledge of how well students are doing and the data about students' outcomes. They know the school's strengths and areas for development. They are aware of how the pupil premium funding is spent and the impact it has on students' progress, including on attendance. They know about the quality of teaching and ensure that performance management is used effectively to reward staff when this is appropriate. Any staff underperformance is tackled decisively.

Outcomes for boarders/Outcomes for residential students	are outstanding
Quality of boarding provision and care/Quality of residential provision and care	is outstanding
Boarders' safety/Residential students' safety	is outstanding
Leadership and management of boarding provision/Leadership and management of the residential provision	is outstanding

- Residential students have extremely strong relationships with staff who clearly put their needs and their welfare at the centre of practice. Staff ensure residential students receive consistent routines and boundaries alongside sensitive and nurturing care. Consequently, residential students develop trust in the adults who guide and support them. The ethos of the residential provision includes acceptance and respect for each other. Residential students are tolerant and supportive of each other.
- Residential students thoroughly enjoy their experience and report positively on the wide range of activities available and the support provided by staff. Their comments include: 'It's great to get out and do things' and 'One of the best things is the teachers and care staff.'
- Residential students feel valued, as they know staff listen to them and help them deal with the difficulties they face. They enjoy each other's company and know their views and opinions are important.
- Excellent support by an experienced and committed staff team provides nurturing, sensitive and highly individualised care ensuring each residential pupil achieves their full potential. Their confidence and self-esteem develop as they mature and respond to staff who recognise their individual strengths and vulnerabilities.
- There is a strong focus on preparing residential students for their next stage. Sensitive planning well in advance of them leaving the school enables residential students to develop the skills and capabilities to cope with their transition. Staff provide intensive support on the practicalities of supporting themselves across a wide range of daily living skills and monitor how the residential students are coping with the actuality of the experience. Residential students respond positively with increased confidence in their ability to look after themselves.
- The quality of care is excellent and the residential students' experience of the provision is of significant benefit and has a wide-ranging, positive impact on the quality of their lives and their future life opportunities. Their residential experience clearly enhances their personal, social and educational development.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its students' needs. This ensures that students are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its students' needs. Students are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its students an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

Boarding/Residential provision		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	A school which provides an exceptional quality of care and significantly exceeds minimum requirements.
Grade 2	Good	A school which provides a high quality of care that exceeds minimum requirements.
Grade 3	Adequate	A school which meets minimum requirements but needs to improve the quality of care it provides.
Grade 4	Inadequate	A school where minimum requirements are not met and the quality of care has serious weaknesses.

School details

Unique reference number	125457
Social care unique reference number	SCO13882
Local authority	Surrey
Inspection number	426397

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	Maintained
Age range of students	11–16
Gender of students	Boys
Number of students on the school roll	55
Number of boarders on roll	24
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Catherine Myers
Headteacher	Craig Anderson
Date of previous school inspection	12–13 October 2010
Telephone number	01737 215488
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