

St Nicholas School

Malmesbury Road, Chippenham, SN15 1QF

Inspection dates

8–9 May 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- The majority of pupils achieve well during their time at the school. They make good gains in improving their reading, writing, communication and mathematics skills.
- Pupils in the Early Years Foundation Stage achieve well and make good progress.
- The progress of pupils supported by additional government funding is outstanding.
- Teaching is good, with some that is outstanding. When teaching is most successful, pupils are highly challenged by some exciting tasks so that they are eager to take part and their progress is rapid and sustained.
- Pupils behave well in and around the school with many benefiting from additional support to fully meet their individual needs. Pupils feel safe at school.
- Parents and carers are pleased with the school. All of the parents and carers who responded to the online questionnaire said that their child is happy at school and makes good progress.
- Good improvement in the range of topics and subjects promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well.
- The headteacher has an ambitious vision for the future of the school. Since his appointment there has been a strong focus on raising achievement through setting targets for teachers and through high-quality training and monitoring.
- The governing body manages the budget well and has an accurate view of the school's work. Governors make sure that pupils who receive additional funding fully benefit from it.
- The sixth form is good. Pupils have many opportunities to experience life outside school. These successfully help prepare them for their next steps in later life and learning.

It is not yet an outstanding school because:

- Younger pupils do not always have enough opportunities to use communication aids to support their speaking skills so that they can respond to questions and make decisions and choices about their learning.
- The outdoor environment has not been developed well enough to support the learning of all age groups.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed 13 lessons, most jointly with the senior leaders. In addition, the inspectors made a few shorter visits to observe pupils’ learning, listened to some pupils read and visited the off-site training provider for sixth form pupils.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, senior leaders and managers, other staff, members of the governing body and a representative from the local authority.
- The inspectors observed the work of the school and looked at a number of documents, including the school’s own information about pupils’ progress, planning and monitoring documents, safeguarding information, the sports premium action plan and pupils’ books and files.
- Inspectors took account of the 21 responses to the online survey, Parent View. Inspectors also took account of 36 responses to the staff inspection questionnaire.

Inspection team

Denise Morris, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Fiona Robinson	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school caters for pupils aged four to 19 with severe or profound learning difficulties from across Wiltshire.
- All pupils have a statement of special educational needs. A high proportion of pupils also have a diagnosis of autism or complex healthcare needs. A few have additional visual, hearing or multi-sensory impairments and/or challenging behaviour.
- There is Early Years Foundation Stage which is shared with older pupils in Years 1 and 2. Pupils join the school at different times, not just in the Early Years Foundation Stage.
- Most pupils are White British. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds is very low, and there are no pupils new to speaking English. There are many more boys than girls.
- The proportion of pupils for whom the school receives the pupil premium (additional funding for certain groups, including pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and those looked after by the local authority) is above average.
- The school also receives primary school sports funding and additional funding to help those in Year 7 catch up.
- The school has recently purchased a bungalow nearby for the use of the older pupils in the sixth form which provides off-site training in personal and social skills. There is no other off-site training.
- Pupils are not entered early for examinations.
- The headteacher is relatively new to the school and has been in post for nine months.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Make better use of communication aids for younger pupils so that they all have opportunities to contribute in class and to make choices and decisions about their learning.
- Improve outdoor learning opportunities for all age groups by:
 - developing the school grounds so that all pupils have the opportunity to learn and play outdoors on a regular basis
 - investigating outdoor opportunities beyond the school site so that older pupils can further develop their social and work-related skills.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

is good

- Pupils' attainment on entry to St Nicholas School is usually well below that expected for their age, because of their learning difficulties. Most pupils quickly begin to catch up, due to high quality support and well-matched tasks and resources that suit their own particular abilities and needs. As a result they achieve well during their time at the school.
- All groups make at least good progress in English and mathematics, including those with a diagnosis of autism, behaviour, social and emotional needs, complex medical conditions and/or sensory difficulties.
- Pupils supported by additional government funding make excellent progress in English and mathematics because of regular and sustained support on tasks that are planned specifically for each pupil.
- The most-able pupils make particularly good progress in reading. They use their phonics (the sounds that letters make) skills and pictures or symbols well to read new and unknown words. A few older pupils were able to read fluently to inspectors and talk about their reading.
- Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage achieve well in their areas of learning because of skilled support and understanding of their needs. Achievement is not yet outstanding because occasionally there are times when the lack of alternative means of communication limits their ability to respond. This is also true of some pupils in Years 1 and 2.
- Most pupils are confident to speak in class and to visitors. The mainly effective use of information and communication technology and a range of communication aids in most classes ensures that the vast majority of pupils have a means to communicate, express themselves and respond to questions.
- Additional funding for pupils in Year 7 is used effectively, enabling these pupils to benefit from additional resources to support their communication and language skills and to receive individual help in literacy so that any pupils falling behind others quickly catch up and achieve well.
- Achievement in writing is good with many pupils using technology such as tablets or switches as well as symbols to make sentences.
- Almost all pupils achieve well in mathematics. Pupils in Years 7 to 10 for example showed that they could use their mathematics skills well to order their schedules and identify time on analogue clocks. They enjoyed the hands-on practical tasks that were provided.
- In the older classes, including the sixth form, pupils benefit from accredited courses preparing them well for their futures. However, the outdoor area of the school is not developed or used well enough to increase independence or promote vocational opportunities for these older pupils.
- Pupils' sports skills are improving due to additional funding that has enabled the school to provide additional coaching.

The quality of teaching

is good

- Pupils benefit from teaching that is almost always good, and some that is outstanding ensuring that they all make at least good progress. Teaching encourages pupils to join in with practical activities that meet the needs and abilities of each individual pupil, helping them all to engage well in learning.
- The teaching of mathematics, for example, is well organised with high expectations of all groups. In Years 3 and 4 this was evident as pupils were able to sing a song which helped them to match numbers displayed around the room, showing independence and confidence.
- The teaching of English typically engages pupils well because additional support, usually by teaching assistants, is tailored carefully to each pupil's needs. This was evident when an older group of pupils with autism used their picture exchange communication systems very well to respond to questions about a story, to decide what they wanted to do next and to show adults

that they had completed a task.

- Resources are mainly used well in lessons. Communication aids such as signs, symbols and/or technology are well planned for in the majority of lessons and ensure that those who find speaking and writing difficult have a means to respond and express themselves. Teaching is not yet outstanding because teachers do not always plan for the use of different communication aids to ensure all pupils, particularly younger ones, are given the help they need to communicate and respond.
- The teaching of reading is very effective because of the good teaching of phonics and regular daily reading practice. As a result, the most-able pupils can read simple stories fluently while others quickly learn to read words or symbols or use switches to help them enjoy stories.
- The teaching of writing for the most-able pupils enables them to express their ideas well through their writing tasks; other pupils use symbols or technology to share their ideas and thoughts.
- Teachers regularly plan practical mathematics tasks which pupils of all abilities really enjoy. For example, in Years 1 to 4 pupils showed that they were able to sequence numbers to 12 accurately and match numerals to 20. They made good progress because of exciting approaches and resources that pupils want to use.
- The checking of pupils' progress is accurate and typically helpful, providing examples of how pupils can improve their skills. This is particularly evident in English and mathematics.
- Good teaching in the sixth form, characterised by well-planned practical approaches that pupils value, results in mature and sensible attitudes enabling pupils to achieve well.
- Sixth formers attend life-skills training sessions in the bungalow, which enables them to improve their independence and work-related learning as they make choices, create shopping lists, go shopping and prepare lunch for themselves and others on a regular basis.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Pupils' behaviour in and around the school is good. They are polite and helpful and have very positive attitudes to learning. They say that they enjoy school. This is evident in the way that their attendance is rising and in the very low rate of absences and lack of any exclusions.
- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. Older pupils told the inspectors that they feel really safe at school. The most-able pupils know the importance of staying safe on the internet and in the community.
- Pupils told the inspectors that there is no bullying at the school and that any teasing is quickly dealt with by staff. Observations of the schools' records showed this to be true. Good behaviour is promoted well through awards, through staff role models, the wide range of activities and clubs, and the different trips and visits that the school provides.
- The behaviour of a few pupils with very challenging emotional difficulties very rarely affects the learning of others. It is always well dealt with by staff through the effective and collaborative behaviour management system so that any disruptions are minimised quickly.
- The promotion of students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is effective. Assemblies, visits to the local area and visitors help pupils to develop an accurate view of life outside their own communities.
- Students in the sixth form show good personal skills. They have effective opportunities to learn about cooking and personal care. Sixth formers are helpful around the school taking on simple jobs such as clearing away chairs after assembly.
- Behaviour and safety are not outstanding because pupils do not always have enough opportunities to extend their personal development through work-related and outdoor activities.

The leadership and management are good

- Since his appointment the headteacher has driven improvement tirelessly and successfully, enabling the good outcomes from the previous inspection to be maintained. He has generated a feeling of urgency and shown good levels of ambition for each pupil making sure that each achieves their best. The headteacher is ably supported by the staff, senior leadership team, governors and parents and carers.
- Leaders make effective use of the national standards for teaching to improve teachers' skills. There are several examples of staff at all levels undertaking training and acquiring additional qualifications so that their pupils make even better progress. This additional training has had a strong impact on some new initiatives, particularly the new tracking system that is helping staff to set challenging targets for all pupils.
- Leaders check pupils' progress regularly to make sure that they are making good progress and so that they can support the learning of any pupil falling behind. Information about pupils' achievement shows that pupils' progress is improving and the school has closed any gaps in achievement. A high proportion of pupils are now on target to achieve higher-level targets than in previous years.
- The school provides regular training for staff in aspects such as behaviour and safeguarding, ensuring consistent practice across the school.
- The local authority works well with the school by supporting leaders in checking the quality of teaching and learning and by providing training for staff so that teaching improves.
- There are some good links with local schools, colleges and businesses, helping to develop pupils' academic and personal skills and providing experiences that will benefit them in the future.
- The rich range of subjects and topics taught includes regular visits into the community and enrichment days such as 'Christmas around the World'. Links with a school in Tanzania and partnership for older pupils with a local craft centre provide well for pupils' awareness of the wider world and work-related learning.
- Leaders promote good relationships with parents and carers who are pleased with the school. Through what they provide, leaders successfully eliminate discrimination and promote good relationships which make sure that all pupils have equal access to the experiences on offer.
- Leadership of the sixth form is good because it promotes the learning and personal development of pupils well, is constantly seeking to improve and offers good quality, appropriate qualifications.
- Safeguarding procedures meet requirements.
- Leadership and management are not yet outstanding because there is still more to do to ensure that all pupils have even better access to a wide range of communication aids and to enhance outdoor learning so that pupils make even better progress.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body is supportive, providing good challenge to leaders. Governors are fully involved in checking what the school offers pupils, and looking at teaching and behaviour and at how well pupils are doing. They have received good quality training and their knowledge of the school's data is accurate. They are fully aware of how the data compare with those of other similar schools. They have an accurate view of what is working well and what needs improving, including a good knowledge of the quality of teaching. Governors have a good range of skills which they use to benefit the school. Effective management of finances means that money is well spent to enrich pupils' learning, including the pupil premium. This money is used well to provide additional support and small-group activities for eligible pupils, enabling them to make even better progress to their classmates. Governors know about setting targets for teachers and leaders and work to ensure that the best staff are rewarded through promotion. They rigorously tackle any underperformance. They ensure that safeguarding procedures meet current requirements.

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 pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils 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 pupils' needs. Pupils 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 pupils 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>

School details

Unique reference number	126552
Local authority	Wiltshire
Inspection number	439468

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range	4–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	72
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	10
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Aileen Bates
Headteacher	Bruce Douglas
Date of previous school inspection	23–24 March 2011
Telephone number	01249 650435
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