

# St Nicholas Special School

St. Nicholas School, Taynton Drive, Merstham, Redhill, Surrey, RH1 3PU

<b>Inspection dates</b>	07/10/2014 to 10/10/2014	
<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>2</b>
Outcomes for residential pupils	Outstanding	1
Quality of residential provision and care	Good	2
Residential pupils' safety	Good	2
Leadership and management of the residential provision	Good	2

## Summary of key findings

### The residential provision is good because

- Pupils thrive in an environment where staff recognise and value their individual strengths and unique qualities. They make exceptional progress in relation to their starting points in their personal development through increased self-confidence, self esteem and social skills. Improvement in pupils' behaviour is significant. The residential provision is an integral part of the school and is central in advancing pupils' academic, personal, social and emotional development. Routines and structure enable pupils to be more effective learners in the classroom.
- Extremely positive, sensitive and nurturing relationships with experienced and committed staff enable pupils to trust adults who care for them and benefit from their support and guidance. Residential and school staff work together effectively to meet pupils' holistic needs. Collaborative working between staff and families is a strength of the school and promotes positive outcomes for pupils.
- Pupils make huge strides in their emotional well-being due to the close attention paid to their psychological health. Residential staff, education staff and therapists work together effectively to identify pupils' individual needs and devise specific strategies to promote their development. Families recognise and report pupils' significant progress and improvement.
- Robust safeguarding practices ensure pupils are safe. Staff are aware of their safeguarding responsibilities, know each pupil extremely well and protect them in relation to their specific vulnerabilities. Points for improvement in safeguarding practices are made to enhance the protection of pupils.
- Pupils benefit from strong leadership and an experienced staff team who constantly strive to provide opportunities for pupils to achieve positive outcomes. The recently introduced family support group is an example of how the school continuously endeavours to work holistically to meet pupils' needs.

## **Compliance with the national minimum standards for residential special schools**

The school meets the national minimum standards for residential special schools

## Information about this inspection

The school was given three hours notice of the inspection. Meetings were held with the head, head of care, residential staff, boarding forum, cook, family therapist, art therapist, year 7 and 8 tutors, site manager, HR manager, assistant head of school and behaviour management lead. The inspector joined pupils for three meals including two in residential time. Time was spent on both evenings in the residential unit observing activities. Parents were contacted by telephone following the inspection.

## Inspection team

Janet Hunnam

Lead social care inspector

# **Full report**

## **Information about this 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 2013.

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

- ensure all staff undertake training in child sexual exploitation
- review the quality of all positive handling plans and risk assessments
- review the policy for pupils who are absent without permission to ensure all staff are aware of how the local police protocol is implemented in practice
- consider best practice arrangements for administering medication to ensure the system protects the welfare of pupils.

## Inspection judgements

### Outcomes for residential pupils

### Outstanding

Outcomes for residential pupils are outstanding. Pupils flourish within a nurturing and supportive environment where they develop confidence and self-esteem. A parent commented that the pupil has 'improved so much, he is not so shy and timid and is now much more confident'. Pupils enjoy exceptionally good quality relationships with staff and enjoy being in their company. Staff respond to pupils with warmth and good humour. Consequently, pupils listen to staff and accept the support staff offer, enabling them to make significant progress in relation to their starting points. Parents and carers report pupils' 'amazing progress' in terms of engaging with their academic learning, having 'a much better attitude and being able to work through problems', 'better behaviour, more helpful and polite'. Pupils are developing socially and emotionally, showing a marked improvement in their behaviour and these developments are having an extremely positive impact on their learning and family relationships.

Pupils report extremely positively on their boarding experience. One pupil commented 'everything about it is good'. They succeed in a setting where they are valued as individuals and where their views are appreciated. All pupils have a key worker who consults with them on an individual basis but pupils report they can approach any member of staff. A pupil commented, 'I can go to staff with anything and they will help'. The Boarding Forum meets formally every half term where pupils put forward suggestions for activities, discuss rewards in relation to the incentive points system and other matters affecting their boarding experience. Staff respond to their suggestions and concerns, allowing pupils to develop self-esteem and confidence, knowing their views matter and staff take them into account. Additionally, pupils complete surveys to provide managers with feedback on specific matters to contribute to on-going development of the service.

Pupils benefit from having their physical and emotional health promoted to an excellent standard. They have their medical needs met and receive support from specialist health professionals where needed such as speech and language therapy and art therapy to meet their individual needs. Such individualised support from all staff enable pupils to feel understood and emotionally safe.

There is a strong focus on developing independence skills and preparing pupils for their next stage. From an early stage, pupils are encouraged to help with chores, keep their bedrooms tidy and develop daily living skills. Older pupils have more structured independent living skills programmes, spending some time in a separate flat and taking more personal responsibility. Parents and carers note real progress in this area with developments transferred to home where pupils demonstrate the independence skills they have acquired. Pupils mature, respond positively to taking responsibility and some develop into mentors and role models for younger pupils. Comprehensive transition plans are personalised for each pupil and designed to promote a successful move to live with their family and begin the next stage as they embark on adulthood.

### Quality of residential provision and care

### Good

The quality of the residential provision is good. Excellent support by a committed staff team provides encouraging, sensitive and highly individualised care allowing pupils to make significant progress in all aspects of their lives. A parent commented that they 'cannot speak highly enough' of the boarding provision'. Another stated, 'I have not got a bad word to say about it, he has come on leaps and bounds'.

Induction into boarding is thoughtfully planned with an emphasis on pupils feeling comfortable and happy in the residential environment. Home visits ensure staff have a comprehensive picture of the individual pupils' needs and the support they require. Staff send a colourful and child-

friendly booklet to the pupil before they commence to familiarise them with staff, routines, activities and the reward system for good behaviour. Education and care staff work closely together and communicate effectively, ensuring all staff are aware of pupils' current needs and agree the best possible strategies to support them consistently. Parents and carers report that they are also integral to this process through regular discussion with residential staff and feel they are 'working together' in the best interests of the pupils. These collaborative relationships between residential staff, school staff and families are a strength of the school and promote positive outcomes for pupils.

Staff clearly understand the needs of individual pupils and know each pupil extremely well. Care plans identify each pupil's specific needs with key workers supporting pupils in areas for development by setting targets and working through relevant topics enabling pupils to make progress.

Pupils are enthusiastic about the activities offered and engage in a wide range of leisure pursuits both on site and in the wider community. Pupils commented that boarding 'is great fun' and 'activities are excellent'. Pupils choose from a range of evening activities such as go-karting, swimming, cinema, football, night hikes and on site activities such as computer games, pool, dvds and karaoke. Such activities extend pupils' social experiences and enable them to learn how to use their leisure time positively. Staff organise unit evenings once a week targeting specific topics such as anti-smoking, fire prevention and personal hygiene to extend pupils' knowledge and awareness of important issues. Additional support for reading and maths is a regular evening activity, allowing pupils additional opportunities to develop their skills to promote their education outcomes.

Arrangements to meet health needs ensure pupils receive appropriate support. Working closely with parents and carers, staff ensure pupils attend regular health appointments. Staff receive specialist training to meet the specific health needs of pupils ensuring they have the knowledge and skills to provide specialist care when needed. The procedures for the administration of medication have been improved since the last inspection. The policy and procedure for administering medication take into account secondary dispensing and procedures in relation to this practice are more robust. However, such secondary dispensing does not meet best practice recommendations and has the potential for errors and risk to pupils. Staff promote a healthy lifestyle through encouraging pupils to eat a nutritious, balanced diet and supporting them to take part in active leisure pursuits.

The emotional health of pupils has a high priority. Pupils have access to on site therapists and staff work closely with external specialist health professionals when necessary. A worker from the child and adolescent mental health service provides support and training for staff. A recent development has been the introduction of a family support group led by a qualified therapist. Parents and carers are supported to understand the pupil's behaviour with pupils benefitting from feeling understood. Consequently, pupils and their families are experiencing improvements in their relationships. Pupils' relationships with their peers are also improving.

Residential accommodation is of an excellent standard. Communal areas are spacious, comfortable and very well-equipped to meet the needs of pupils. The environment is bright and interesting showing pupils' achievements and activities. Pupils enjoy the communal spaces and appreciate the high standard of their bedrooms, which they personalise giving them a sense of identity and belonging.

Pupils are able to contact their families easily with their own mobile phones or the use of school telephones. Parents report that communication with staff is excellent. Staff contact them at least weekly to update them on pupils' progress and report anything of significance.

## **Residential pupils' safety**

**Good**

The arrangements in place to ensure pupils receive safe care and are protected from harm are good. Pupils report that they feel safe whilst in the residential provision and parents and carers have no concerns regarding their safety.

Safeguarding pupils is a priority. Recruitment processes are robust ensuring that only adults who have been checked as being suitable to work with children are employed. Clear policies and procedures reflect the vulnerabilities of pupils and these, together with up-to-date training, fully support staff to provide excellent safeguarding measures. All staff receive appropriate child protection and safeguarding training. The head of care and two assistant heads of school are designated child protection officers. Rigorous procedures are in place to report any concerns and staff are confident in their safeguarding role. They are alert in recognising causes for concern and taking proper action to protect pupils.

Pupils report that bullying is not a problem and is taken seriously by staff. A pupil commented that 'if it happens, staff deal with it'. Staff understand the importance of keeping pupils safe on-line and address e-safety formally with pupils in assemblies and informally through key working and day-to-day discussions. A local radio station is booked to deliver a project with pupils focusing on protecting pupils on social media this term. Policies, procedures and protocols are in place to protect pupils when they leave the site without permission, though incidents are not frequent. The policy in relation to pupils leaving the site without permission makes reference to local police protocols but the procedure is not clear regarding how staff will implement these protocols. However, staff are mindful of their safeguarding responsibilities in relation to reporting pupils to the police as missing should this be necessary. They are also aware of the risks facing pupils in relation to child sexual exploitation, but they are yet to participate in specific training on this issue.

Promoting positive behaviour is a clear strength of the residential provision. Staff help pupils understand their feelings and think about why they behave in certain ways, to effect change. Pupils have individual behaviour targets with daily rewards and sanctions linked to how well they are meeting their targets. Emphasis is placed on recognising and valuing each pupil's achievements with rewards linked to activities. Pupils respond extremely well to this system and all are motivated to increasing their points and improving their behaviour. The system is effective and behaviour within the residential provision is of a high standard. Such improvements in behaviour transfer to the classroom and home environment. Education staff report that the incentive scheme supports pupils to manage their own behaviour.

Incidents of inappropriate behaviour are infrequent within the residential provision. Strong, trusting relationships between staff and pupils enable pupils to accept the support staff offer. Staff receive training to manage challenging behaviour and are highly skilled in de-escalating potential crises. Positive handling plans are in place for pupils, incorporating risk assessments. Some of these plans and risk assessments are not sufficiently detailed or individualised and thus reduces their effectiveness for staff in providing well-informed support to protect pupils.

Safety of the residential provision is monitored effectively. A range of health and safety checks and fire safety checks are carried out regularly including fire drills for residential pupils. Risk assessments are regularly reviewed and updated. These include environmental checks and activities.

## **Leadership and management of the residential provision**

**Good**

The leadership and management of the residential provision are good. Led by a committed and experienced head of care, the residential staff team provide pupils with support enabling them to

recognise their inappropriate behaviour, make informed choices and take responsibility for their actions. Senior managers work closely together to ensure the residential provision is fully integrated into the school and is central in advancing pupils' academic, personal, social and emotional development. Education staff recognise the value of the residential provision. They have observed that the residential routines and structure result in improved sleep and eating patterns enabling pupils to be more effective learners in the classroom.

The experienced staff team are dedicated to promoting the best interests of all residential pupils, continuously thinking how they can improve strategies to further support pupils. Staff know the pupils and their families very well enabling them to provide highly individualised care, support and guidance. Staff receive regular supervision and annual appraisal allowing them to reflect on their practice and consider their development needs. Communication and information sharing amongst staff is excellent, resulting in prompt interventions to support pupils and ensuring a consistently high standard of care.

The head of care regularly monitors residential provision, ensuring the service continues to evolve and provide opportunities for pupils to develop and make progress. An external person visits every half term, further underpinning the monitoring and evaluation of the provision to maintain high standards. Managers have acted upon recommendations made at the previous inspection in considering the effectiveness of sanctions but have not fully implemented and embedded best practice recommendations in relation to the administration of medication.

Complaints are extremely rare due to the excellent communication between staff and families. Parents and carers report that they can easily approach staff with any concerns. Formal complaints are dealt with appropriately. Information is readily available for pupils about making a complaint but because of their trusting relationships with staff and their confidence in approaching staff, concerns are dealt with promptly without resort to formal procedures.



## What inspection judgements mean

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

<b>Unique reference number</b>	125457
<b>Social care unique reference number</b>	SC013882
<b>DfE registration number</b>	936/7012

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.

<b>Type of school</b>	
<b>Number of boarders on roll</b>	27
<b>Gender of boarders</b>	Boys
<b>Age range of boarders</b>	11 to 16
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mr Craig Anderson
<b>Date of previous boarding inspection</b>	10/09/2013
<b>Telephone number</b>	01737 215488
<b>Email address</b>	admin@stn.surrey.sch.uk

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