

St Nicholas Special School

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

Inspection dates	19/01/2016 to 26/01/2016	
The overall experiences and progress of children and young people	Good	2
The quality of care and support	Outstanding	1
How well children and young people are protected	Good	2
The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers	Good	2

Summary of key findings

The residential provision is good because

- Residential pupils receive an outstanding quality of care. They make progress both academically and personally. They speak extremely positively about their residential experiences.
- Safeguarding arrangements are good. Strong links exist with partnership agencies. Residential pupils say they feel safe.
- Residential pupils are successfully prepared for adulthood through effective life skills preparation. Access to a self-contained independence flat on-site assists greatly with this.
- Areas for improvement identified include ensuring robust implementation of the recruitment policy and further embedding of consistently good risk management practice.
- Support for residential pupils with their boarding forum role is not clearly apparent. The only complaint from a residential pupil since the previous inspection is not recorded on their file.
- Immediate action was taken by the school to address shortfalls in private access to a telephone and fire safety.

Compliance with the national minimum standards for residential special schools

The school meets the national minimum standards for residential special schools

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure risk assessments detail clearly the identified risks and are reviewed after significant incidents
- Ensure the recruitment policy is followed consistently for any adult who may have unsupervised access to residential pupils as part of their role
- Ensure fire doors are not wedged open
- Ensure residential pupils are offered support, as appropriate, with their role as member of the boarding forum
- Ensure residential pupils have free access to a telephone to make private phone calls
- Ensure records are kept on individual residential pupil's files of complaints made to show investigations and actions taken

Information about this inspection

The social care inspector was on site four hours after the inspection was announced. Observations of the accommodation area took place over two evenings. Meals were shared with residential pupils. Discussions took place with residential pupils both informally and in planned discussions. The inspector spent time with the senior leadership team, teachers, chair of governors, care staff and therapy staff. Four questionnaires from residential pupils were considered. Telephone and written feedback was received from parents. Documents relating to safety and welfare of residential pupils were sampled.

Inspection team

Anna Williams

Lead social care inspector

Full Report

Information about this school

St Nicholas School is a maintained residential school for 63 boys aged between 10 and 16 years. Up to 24 boys can reside at the school during the week, for 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. It caters for boys who have a primary need in relation to their emotional and behavioural difficulties. The residential provision was previously inspected in October 2014.

Inspection Judgements

The overall experiences and progress of children and young people

Good

Residential pupils are exceptionally positive about boarding, one said 'it's brilliant here!' They reflect on progress they have made. A residential pupil commented 'I used to be shy, I would not talk to anyone. Now I am more sociable and more confident'. Another said 'I used to be a little terror. Staff helped me realise what the right thing to do was'.

Becoming a residential pupil has a positive impact on their learning outcomes. Residential pupils describe how care staff members answer academic questions and help them with homework. 'I am doing better in my lessons since boarding. I focus better' one residential pupil told the inspector. Staff across the whole school work together effectively for the benefit of residential pupils. Clear baseline information demonstrates individual pupil's starting points. Records show good ongoing progress made over terms and years.

Residential pupils wholeheartedly enjoy the activities on offer. They said 'there are great activities, it's incredible here', and 'I think it's much better than most schools'. This gives them opportunities to make new friends and try new experiences.

Observations show the warm and constructive relationships present between residential pupils and staff members. The residential provision provides a well-organised environment where residential pupils grow and learn together. A residential pupil commented 'If I have a problem, they [staff members] always help me on boarding'. Overall, behaviour seen during the whole inspection was good.

A boarding forum meets on a termly basis. Residential pupils engage well in this feedback and idea-sharing arena. Some pupils' thoughts have been translated into reality, such as water jugs which are now available in each corridor. However, other ideas raised by some residential pupils are repeated, sometimes for years without fruition. Records do not show if or how care staff have supported these pupils to realise their suggestions.

Most residential pupils have their own mobile phone which they use to make contact with family and friends at any time. A small number of boarders do not. The payphone provided is located in the large, open plan lounge area, making private calls impossible. The school took immediate action. A cordless phone will be provided in the near future to allow more privacy.

A strength of the residential provision is how well pupils are prepared for adulthood. Residential pupils feel better prepared and more independent when they leave. They learn practical life skills which they take into the wider world. Progress is captured through photos in individual files.

Safeguarding is given a high priority. Good links with external child protection agencies mean concerns are passed on promptly. Health and well-being arrangements are highly effective. Individual residential pupil's needs are identified and fully met. The senior leadership team is effective at monitoring the quality of care. Development plans in place show they identify appropriate areas for improvement.

New residential pupils receive a thoughtfully designed welcome booklet. Through child-friendly games and puzzles, they learn about boarding life and routines. A dedicated 'home to school' link worker provides support to parents and carers. This includes help and advice on attendance and further education choices for pupils.

Residential pupils' outcomes are tracked. This ensures targeted support is provided in a timely way to help them progress personally and academically. Education and care staff work very effectively together to identify strategies to help residential pupils continually progress. As a result, residential pupils achieve consistent and sustained improvements across their boarding and school life.

Residential pupils benefit from an art therapy service. Care staff work closely with therapy professionals and are kept up to date with individual pupils' progress. Weekly input from a child and adolescent mental health worker means residential pupils quickly access support for any emerging emotional needs.

Arrangements for the administration of medication are improved. Following the previous inspection the school commissioned an external pharmacy audit to learn from and develop practice. Secondary dispensing no longer takes place. New processes are safe and effective. Residential pupils' medication needs are fully met.

Parents and carers know how well residential pupils are progressing through regular contact, usually by key workers. A family member said 'staff ring me every week and I can ring him anytime'.

Residential pupils stay in accommodation which is well maintained and of very good quality. The boarding area offers a variety of in-house activities such as computers, arts and crafts, cinema room, pool table and lounge space. Residential pupils use all the space to socialise and relax together. An independence flat offers older pupils opportunity to live separately from the main group of boarders. When using this flat, they successfully practice life skills in a realistic, and safe environment. A residential pupil commented 'the independence flat helped me learn to cook and clean up after myself'.

Catering arrangements are of an excellent standard. Residential pupils take an active role during each evening meal. They efficiently help staff prepare, present and serve food for the whole boarding group. Fellow pupils listen and wait their turn respectfully. This creates a warm and friendly mealtime experience. Everyone sits together, chatting about their day or evening activity plans. Food is of good quality and plentiful. Residential pupils say they like it.

Residential pupils experience an exceedingly wide range of activities. These include school-based events such as homework club, baking, competitions, movie night, board games and 'chill time'. Residential pupils described the off-site trips enthusiastically. These community based events include night hikes, map hunts, shopping, soft play, and life skills sessions. Evenings out in local towns are also popular. These provide residential pupils with varied experiences which develops them personally and socially.

Physical activity is promoted through the wide choice of sports which residential pupils regularly engage in. These include golf, dodgeball, football, swimming and gym sessions. This positively impacts on the health of boarders.

How well children and young people are protected

Good

Strong links exist between the senior leadership team and safeguarding agencies. Regular attendance at relevant multi-agency meetings means the school is fully involved in active child protection strategies. Staff effectively use internal reporting systems to raise concerns about individual residential pupils' welfare. These are appropriately shared with allocated social workers and external referrals are made as required.

The school's missing pupil policy has been revised. Staff now demonstrate a good awareness of their responsibilities in implementing this, including the local police protocol. Staff follow and search for residential pupils who leave the premises. Local police are informed as appropriate. All pupils receive a de-brief to explore the reasons why they have left.

Residential pupils are made aware of behavioural expectations. They respond well to reward systems. Trained staff implement a consistent approach to behaviour management. Sanction and restraint records demonstrate these are reasonable and fair. A small number of residential pupils report bullying by older peers. They reflect that staff take action when made aware. Within the school there is a strong anti-bullying emphasis. The residential provision successfully focuses on friendships, respect and what to do if pupils are worried. Residential pupils identify trusted adults to share concerns with and say they feel safe.

Since the previous inspection, risk assessments and behaviour management plans have been revised. Although improved, the new risk assessment system is not yet fully effective. For example, assessments contain a generic list of 'risks'. They do not describe in detail what behaviour a particular child may show to inform staff of what to monitor. Risk assessments are not always revised following a significant incident to review if a risk rating remain relevant. In some cases, there are differences in staffing levels between education and boarding time, but these are not clearly recorded. This risks confusion and an inconsistent approach.

Good systems are in place for the routine maintenance of health and safety equipment. This ensures the safety of residential pupils and all using the premises. In general, fire safety awareness is good. Residential pupils know what action to take in case of an emergency evacuation. Fire protection is compromised by the residential kitchen fire door being wedged open. Immediate action was taken by the school to address this. However, this had not been identified through internal monitoring systems.

Safe recruitment procedures are followed to ensure only suitable adults commence work in the school. Small inconsistencies in care staff recruitment files were identified. These include the lack of qualifications on one file, and discrepancies in dates of previous employment. The recruitment policy in place is not being robustly implemented.

The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers

Good

The aims and objectives, as set out in the residential provision welcome booklet, are implemented in practice. An experienced and suitably qualified head of care successfully leads a competent care staff team. Governors take an active role in reviewing safeguarding arrangements. They visit the residential provision on a regular basis and report back to senior staff. Residential pupils' opinions are sought during these visits. Effective internal monitoring systems provide good oversight of key areas such as restraints and safeguarding records.

External monitoring visits take place in the required timescales. These reports challenge the residential provision to improve through recommendations set. Feedback and observations of

residential pupils are central to these visits.

There have been no complaints from parents or carers relating to the residential provision since the previous inspection. The one complaint from a residential pupil is not recorded on their personal file. Appropriate action was taken, however, records do not show how this was followed up with the child to see if they were satisfied with the outcome.

Training opportunities are good. A previous recommendation to provide all staff members with child sexual exploitation training has been met. Staff articulate clearly possible indicators of grooming. They understand that risks are online and face to face. They acknowledge that 'it could happen here'. Examples of other training courses include radicalisation and extremism, medication and food hygiene. Most care staff members hold a relevant childcare qualification or are working towards this. This provides residential pupils with well-trained staff who meet their needs.

Formal supervision takes place alongside informal daily guidance and direction. Care staff speak positively of the senior leadership team and support provided. Three of the previous recommendations have been fully met. One recommendation linked to risk assessments has been addressed but consistent good practice is not yet embedded. A new point to improve is set to reflect this. Development plans suitably focus senior staff on further improving the residential provision.

What inspection judgements mean

The experiences and progress of children and young people are at the centre of the inspection. Inspectors will use their professional judgement to determine the weight and significance of their findings in this respect. The judgements included in the report are made against *Inspections of boarding and residential provision in schools: the inspection framework*.

Judgement	Description
Outstanding	A school where the experiences and progress of children and young people consistently exceeds the standard of good and results in sustained progress and achievement. The outcomes achieved by children and young people are outstanding and the impact the boarding/residential provision has had in supporting this progress and achieving these outcomes is clearly evidenced.
Good	A school providing effective services which exceed minimum requirements. Children and young people are protected and cared for and have their welfare safeguarded and promoted.
Requires improvement	A school where there are no serious or widespread failures that result in children and young people's welfare not being safeguarded or promoted. However, the overall outcomes, experiences and progress of children and young people are not yet good.
Inadequate	A school where there are serious and/or widespread failures that mean children and young people are not protected or their welfare is not promoted or safeguarded or if their care and experiences are poor and they are not making progress.

School details

Unique reference number	125457
Social care unique reference number	SC013882
DfE registration number	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.

Type of school	Residential Special School
Number of boarders on roll	24
Gender of boarders	Boys
Age range of boarders	11 to 16
Headteacher	Mr Craig Anderson
Date of previous boarding inspection	07/10/2014
Telephone number	01737 215488
Email address	head@stn.surrey.sch.uk

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