

# St Nicholas School

Malmesbury Road, Chippenham, Wiltshire SN15 1QF

## Inspection dates

21–22 November 2017

| Overall effectiveness                        | Requires improvement |
|--|----------------------|
| Effectiveness of leadership and management   | Requires improvement |
| Quality of teaching, learning and assessment | Requires improvement |
| Personal development, behaviour and welfare  | Good                 |
| Outcomes for pupils                          | Requires improvement |
| Early years provision                        | Good                 |
| 16 to 19 study programmes                    | Good                 |
| Overall effectiveness at previous inspection | Good                 |

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a school that requires improvement

- Leaders and governors have not ensured that assessment information is correct and do not monitor teaching closely enough. As a result, they do not have an accurate view of the school's effectiveness.
- Plans to improve the school's work are not sufficiently focused on priorities. Leaders do not always keep to the timescales agreed for tasks to be completed. Progress to improve standards of teaching is too slow.
- The quality of teaching is too variable. Teachers do not ensure that pupils' literacy, numeracy and communication skills are improved through work planned across the curriculum.
- Leadership responsibility is not shared widely enough to ensure that all staff feel well supported and led.
- Leaders have not finalised plans to use this year's funds for improving outcomes for disadvantaged pupils. A large amount of last year's fund was not spent.
- The curriculum is not planned in sufficient detail to ensure that it is matched to the particular needs of pupils.
- Until recently there has been limited opportunity to compare pupils' work completed for different teachers, or to compare work done in other special schools. This has restricted teachers' ability to be confident about how well pupils are progressing.

### The school has the following strengths

- Leaders have an accurate understanding of what actions are required to address existing weaknesses.
- Pupils behave well and are keen to learn. The school is a calm, well-ordered environment.
- Students in the post-16 department and children in the early years make good progress. Both of these areas of the school are well led.
- Pupils' personal development is good. When pupils face particular challenges, the school works closely with other agencies to provide good support.

## Full report

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

- Improve leadership and management of the school by ensuring that:
  - leaders regularly check the strengths and weaknesses in teaching and pupils' progress in order to have an up-to-date understanding of how well the school is performing
  - plans focus on the most important areas that require improvement, and that actions are completed on time so that standards improve quickly
  - leaders share responsibility as widely as possible so that improvement plans are implemented effectively, and so staff feel well supported and led
  - the curriculum is planned in sufficient detail to make sure that the school meets the particular needs of different groups
  - leaders use additional funds for disadvantaged pupils effectively.
- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment by ensuring that:
  - assessments are carried out consistently, and are in line with judgements made in good or outstanding special schools for pupils with similar starting points
  - where possible, lessons include plans to develop pupils' literacy, numeracy, and communication skills and knowledge further.

An external review of the school's use of pupil premium funding should be undertaken to assess how this aspect of the school's work may be improved.

## Inspection judgements

### Effectiveness of leadership and management

### Requires improvement

- The headteacher has a clear vision of how she wants the school to be, and the steps that are required to get there. Good progress has been made in the post-16 department and the early years. However, the pace of development for the rest of the school has been too slow.
- The leadership team has been strengthened by making the role of deputy headteacher a full-time and non-teaching one, and supporting middle leaders to take on more responsibility. Nonetheless, leadership is still not shared widely enough. This means that teachers have not always understood the reasons for changes that have been introduced and have not been able to implement them successfully. At times, this has had a negative impact on staff morale.
- The ability of leaders to carry out their duties over the past year was reduced by staff absences from school. As a result, leaders have not been able to monitor the work of the school closely enough, or ensure the completion of planned improvements. As a result, leaders have not resolved weaknesses in teaching.
- School development planning for the past year was not sufficiently focused on the most important areas that required improvement. Too many actions were planned, many of which were not achieved. The plan for this year has not yet been completed.
- Leaders are in the process of making changes to the way in which pupils' progress is assessed. Some assessments are now linked to the annual goals set as part of each pupil's education, health and care plan. Teachers have just begun to compare the judgements they make about pupils' progress with other teachers in the school. However, there is not yet a common approach to how teachers make judgements about what amounts to good progress, or what evidence is required to demonstrate pupils' progress.
- Although the curriculum identifies relevant areas of study to meet the different needs of pupils, leaders have not yet planned out the content of learning to be covered by different groups of pupils. As a result, pupils' learning is not always consolidated and extended as well as it should be. Parents are not given enough information on the website about what pupils are learning.
- Pupil premium funding is not always used effectively. School information indicates how it has been used to support pupils' progress in a variety of ways. However, because the school's assessments are not reliable, the impact of this spending cannot be verified. For the past three years, the school has not spent all of the allocated funding. Plans for how the funding will be used this year have not yet been completed, so have not been added to the school's website.
- The school supports pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well. Alongside curriculum activities that promote pupils' development, the school runs regular events. These support the school's ethos of valuing all members of the school community, and include all pupils in a range of cultural, musical and sporting activities. Good links with community groups, other schools and the local church extend learning outside school.

- Pupils are helped to prepare for life in modern Britain. They are taught that in a democracy it is important that everyone can have a voice, sharing their thoughts and feelings. The school recognises that, sometimes, pupils communicate these through their behaviour. Values are promoted that encourage care and support for themselves and others, and accepting other people's point of view.
- Leaders have made appropriate use of the primary physical education and sport premium funding. This includes extending the range of alternative sports that pupils can participate in, and increasing opportunities for pupils to take part in competitive sports with other schools.
- The challenge and support partner from the local authority has provided support to the school over the past year that has helped to develop leadership. She has visited the school on a number of occasions, helping to address issues that leaders required help with, including offering coaching to senior leaders.

### **Governance of the school**

- Since the last inspection, governors have developed their understanding of how they should challenge leaders. Each governor oversees an aspect of the school's development plan, and checks on progress when they visit the school. Minutes of their meetings indicate the range of questions they pose to the headteacher, including why pupils make better progress in some subjects than others.
- Governors have not held leaders to account for using the pupil premium funding effectively.
- From their regular visits to classrooms, governors have a good understanding of how well pupils behave and engage in learning. However, their knowledge about pupils' progress is mainly based on school information, which is unreliable.
- The chair of governors oversees safeguarding arrangements and health and safety procedures. She has regular meetings with the designated safeguarding leader, and checks that the annual audit has been completed. She inspects the school site with the premises manager frequently, and ensures that all relevant checks have been completed.
- Governors receive very clear reports about the outcomes of staff appraisals. They have used these to ensure that there is a clear link between performance and pay increases.

### **Safeguarding**

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. School procedures for appointing new staff are very thorough and meet with requirements. Detailed record-keeping confirms that all necessary checks are completed.
- The annual safeguarding audit is used effectively by governors and leaders to keep track on whether the school's policies and procedures have been followed. All staff complete their training requirements within expected time limits. The local authority checks that the audit is complete.
- The designated safeguarding leader has introduced a new online system, which staff use to record any concerns they have about pupils. This system is effective at recording concerns, the actions required following a concern being raised and whether

or not these have been completed. Leaders can quickly and easily see any outstanding actions.

- All online activity goes through a system that alerts staff to unsafe websites or use of inappropriate language. Pupils are taught how to keep themselves safe when on the internet.

## Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

## Requires improvement

- The quality of teaching across the school is variable and not yet consistently good. Teachers do not make the most of opportunities to develop pupils' key skills in reading, writing, mathematics and communication across the curriculum.
- Teachers' expectations are sometimes too low, with pupils working on tasks that do not challenge them. Teaching assistants provide a good level of support to develop pupils' personal and social skills, but are not always used effectively by teachers to accelerate pupils' learning.
- Teachers set targets for pupils' progress linked to the end of year goals from each pupil's education, health and care plan and, where relevant, from an academic assessment system. They use these approaches to identify what each pupil needs to learn next. However, there is not always a clear match between what pupils are working on and the target. Also, there is a lack of consistency in how staff measure the steps between targets.
- Teachers and teaching assistants are not consistent in using the agreed approaches to help pupils communicate. At times, they talk to pupils without using any aids, which makes it hard for pupils to understand or respond. Pupils learn to find a preferred way to communicate and use this well. The ways include using signing, symbols and tablet computers.
- In mathematics, pupils develop practical skills, which they can apply in real-life situations. Some of the older pupils practised adding coins, so that they were ready to serve people at the weekly coffee morning. The most able pupils were expected to add a range of coins to 15 pence, which provided a good level of challenge. The teacher set a time limit for the task to be completed, which kept pupils focused on their learning.
- Pupils work towards their own targets in literacy. Workbooks show that teachers encourage pupils to develop their reading and writing skills in a variety of ways that help them learn. However, sometimes, pupils are not given enough work to consolidate their learning before moving on to another task. An inspector observed pupils enjoying listening to stories. The most able pupils showed a good level of understanding of the main themes from the story, and were able to explain how they thought a character was feeling.
- Pupils are keen to learn. They want to achieve and are happy to complete the task set by their teacher. They work hard. Older pupils are able to concentrate for extended periods of time.

## Personal development, behaviour and welfare

**Good**

### Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development is good.
- Staff know the pupils very well and are able to tailor their support and interventions to reflect this. Relationships between staff and pupils are strong. Pupils enjoy the attention and care they receive from staff, and accept their encouragement to try hard at their work. Pupils are able to become more independent the longer they have been at school.
- When a pupil has difficulties, the school puts in place a specific response to help the pupil manage the situation better. Sometimes this is helping parents improve their ability to communicate with their child, and to provide a more stimulating environment at home. At other times, it is working with staff to ensure that pupils get a consistent response when they display a particular behaviour.
- The school employs a counsellor who runs sessions for pupils with mental health needs. As a result, pupils improve their ability to manage their strong feelings.
- A number of pupils have high absence from school. These are mostly related to pupils' health issues. To support better attendance, the school arranges some health clinics to take place at school.

### Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- The school is a calm and well-managed environment. Pupils behave well in lessons, when moving around the school and at lunchtime. When they arrive in the morning they happily go to class.
- Staff are skilled at building relationships with pupils and using these to encourage pupils to make good choices about their behaviour. Staff provide good support to pupils when they are distressed. This either helps pupils calm quickly, or not become more upset.
- The school has improved the way it records all behaviour incidents. This information can now be more easily analysed to identify factors that may have contributed to a pupil's behaviour difficulty. This has resulted in a reduction in the number of times pupils have needed to be physically managed over the past year. There are also far fewer occasions when pupils are asked to spend time away from the class group due to their behaviour.
- Parents who spoke to an inspector during the inspection said that they were not aware of any bullying in the school. They also said how well their child was doing at the school, and how happy they were. Pupils told an inspector that they felt safe at school, and had friends.

## Outcomes for pupils

## Requires improvement

- When pupils start at the school, they have very low abilities due to their learning difficulties. Their progress across the school is variable and not yet consistently good. Too often, pupils do not make more rapid progress because activities are not set at sufficiently challenging levels and do not help them to develop their communication, literacy and numerical skills.
- School information about pupils' progress in key stages 1 to 4 is insufficient because teachers set targets for pupils' progress in different ways. Leaders do not check that the targets set provide pupils with enough challenge. Progress is measured by whether or not pupils have achieved their targets. Therefore, school information about outcomes is unreliable.
- Pupils make good progress in their behaviour and personal development. Pupils learn how to communicate their thoughts and feelings so that they do not need to show these through their behaviour. Pupils improve their social skills so that they are able to spend time alongside peers and staff during lessons and lunchtimes.
- Records of individual learning plans show that pupils improve their ability to move calmly from one activity to another and complete tasks independently. Pupils have learned to write their first and second name correctly, and place three named symbols on to visual timetables.
- Work seen in lessons shows that the most able pupils do not have a good knowledge of phonics. Staff do not have regular training to develop their own phonics knowledge and so do not teach this accurately. This restricts pupils' progress in both reading and writing.
- In mathematics lessons, pupils have learned to recognise the value of coins, and use them to count up to 15. Lower-ability pupils can sort objects of similar shape or colour.
- Pupils enjoy their learning in the hydropool. They gain trust in the staff to keep them safe in the water. During the sessions, they make progress in strengthening their limbs, and developing their coordination by moving objects with their bodies.

## Early years provision

## Good

- The early years is well led. Leaders provide good support to staff, ensuring that there are sufficient times to carry out planning and assessments as a team. This ensures that all staff have a good understanding of the needs of each child, and that sessions are well prepared.
- Assessment procedures are well planned. These begin with a meeting before the child starts school, where people who know the child well, including parents, share information with staff. During the first half term, staff complete a baseline assessment using a nationally recognised assessment structure. Progress is then measured every term. Records, confirmed through inspection activities, show that children make good progress.
- The curriculum is well planned to meet children's needs. Children quickly learn to follow expected routines. These support children to enjoy using the wide range of interesting

resources and make good progress in their early learning skills.

- Children's behaviour is good. Staff set clear and firm boundaries, which children learn to accept. When children present challenging behaviour, staff calmly maintain their high expectations, which helps children feel safe.
- The early years teacher has made good links with the local authority. This has led to visits to the class by an early years adviser who has scrutinised information about children's progress as part of a local authority audit. This confirmed the school's view that children make good progress.

## 16 to 19 study programmes

**Good**

- This part of the school has improved significantly over the past couple of years. Since the arrival of its new leader, the curriculum has been personalised to meet the particular needs of the students and new courses have been introduced.
- Alongside the courses, an effective approach to setting targets has been established. This identifies the areas of development required for students to help prepare them for their next steps after they leave school. All students have work experience placements that provide them with opportunities to practise their developing skills in real-life situations.
- Students make good progress in a range of accredited courses. As a result, most pupils leave the college with recognised qualifications. All of the students who left the college last July went on to a placement where they would continue to learn.
- Students' behaviour in lessons and at lunchtimes is good. Their good social skills and table manners enable them to share their mealtime well together. Staff have high expectations that students will use their abilities to be as independent as possible. As a result, most students need little support to enjoy their food. Relationships between staff and pupils are very positive. These contribute to students' very positive attitudes to learning and keenness to do their best.



## School details

|                         |           |
|-------------------------|-----------|
| Unique reference number | 126552    |
| Local authority         | Wiltshire |
| Inspection number       | 10032529  |

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

|   |  |
|---|--|
| Type of school  | Special  |
| School category                                       | Community special  |
| Age range of pupils                                   | 4 to 19  |
| Gender of pupils                                      | Mixed  |
| Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes         | Mixed  |
| Number of pupils on the school roll                   | 81   |
| Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes | 16   |
| Appropriate authority                                 | The governing body   |
| Chair   | Aileen Bates   |
| Headteacher   | Rosalyn Way  |
| Telephone number                                      | 01249 650435   |
| Website   | <a href="http://www.st-nicholas.wilts.sch.uk">www.st-nicholas.wilts.sch.uk</a>     |
| Email address   | <a href="mailto:admin@st-nicholas.wilts.sch.uk">admin@st-nicholas.wilts.sch.uk</a> |
| Date of previous inspection                           | 8–9 May 2014   |

## 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 or an education, health and care plan.
- The early years foundation stage class is shared with older pupils in Year 1.
- The post-16 department is based at Poplar College, Chippenham. The school also owns a bungalow, which is used to develop students' life skills.

- The proportion of pupils eligible for the pupil premium is greater than average.
- Most pupils are White British. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups, and those who speak English as an additional language, is below average.
- The school's website does not meet requirements on the publication of information about the curriculum, and how pupil premium funding is used.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed parts of 15 lessons, the majority jointly with the headteacher. They observed behaviour during lessons, and around the school and college at lunchtime.
- Inspectors observed pupils arriving at school in the morning, and spoke with a few parents who brought their children to school.
- Inspectors examined information about pupils' progress, behaviour, attendance, health and safety, and staff recruitment. A variety of meetings took place with leaders, the premises manager, and a group of school governors. There was also a phone conversation with the challenge and support partner from the local authority. An inspector met with a group of pupils. An inspector met with a group of staff.
- Inspectors looked closely at a range of school documents and records, including information on the school's website, minutes of governing body meetings, reports from the challenge and support partner, the school's self-evaluation report, the school's improvement plan, and assessment records. They also looked at pupils' books.
- Inspectors took into account 25 responses from parents to the online questionnaire, Parent View. They also reviewed 30 responses to the staff survey, and 14 responses to the pupil survey.

## Inspection team

Andy Lole, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Jen Edwards

Ofsted Inspector

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