

# Inspection of a good school: St Nicholas CofE (VA) Primary School and Nursery

Six Hills Way, Stevenage, Hertfordshire SG2 0PZ

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Inspection dates:

25–26 February 2020

## Outcome

St Nicholas CofE (VA) Primary School and Nursery continues to be a good school.

However, the inspector has some concerns that standards may be declining, as set out below.

## What is it like to attend this school?

St Nicholas CofE Primary School and Nursery has a strong sense of community. One parent told me that 'this is a caring school with dedicated and kind staff'. Pupils and staff demonstrate the school values: learning, loving, living in God's family. Pupils behave well in the classroom and on the playground.

Staff have high expectations of all pupils but not all pupils receive the same high-quality education. In key stage 2, pupils do not have enough opportunities to extend the reading skills which they successfully developed in key stage 1. Curriculum areas other than writing, mathematics and science are not yet well organised so that pupils learn more and remember more.

Pupils work well together and support one another. Older pupils act as sports ambassadors on the playground, helping younger children to have active breaktimes. Pupils told me that they feel safe in school. Key stage 2 pupils are well supported to stay safe online. During the inspection, they were learning about online identity theft, as part of 'Safer Internet Week'. Bullying is very rare, and pupils told me that 'teachers would sort it out quickly' if it did happen.

## What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

There have been many positive changes and improvements since the headteacher's relatively new appointment. Leaders have rightly focused on sequencing an effective curriculum for early reading, mathematics, writing and science. Leaders' plans for other subjects are at an early stage.

The sequence for teaching phonics in the early years and key stage 1 is a strength. Pupils are confident in using their knowledge to tackle unfamiliar words. Teachers accurately match pupils' reading books to the sounds they know. Support for pupils falling behind

the school's phonics programme is effective and enables pupils to catch up quickly. Almost all pupils in the early years and key stage 1 read nearly every day and are enthusiastic about their reading.

In key stage 2, pupils reading frequency drops dramatically from that of the early years and key stage 1 pupils. Pupils do not always read texts that are matched to their reading abilities. Teachers do not extend pupils' reading comprehension skills sufficiently. Some teachers do not know how to plan activities that build upon pupils' understanding of reading. This means that pupils are not achieving as well as they should in reading.

In writing, leaders have mapped out pupils' learning. Teachers teach concepts in sequence to build pupils' understanding. Pupils apply these concepts across a range of writing purposes. For example, in Year 3, one pupil had written a formal letter: 'I would like to inform you that I am deeply concerned ...' Pupils rarely repeat mistakes as teachers' feedback supports them to improve their work.

Many staff are new to their subject leadership roles. They do not yet have effective monitoring systems in place for subjects other than writing, mathematics, early reading and science. Leaders, governors and local authority advisers are aware of this and have a plan for improvement.

The new leader for special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) has made positive changes so that support matches pupils' needs. As one parent told me that 'the school is unbelievably supportive of my child's needs'.

Pupils enjoy school. They speak enthusiastically about the range of clubs, activities and opportunities on offer. The musical talents of pupils are well developed; for example, the school choir have sung at the Royal Albert Hall and the O2 Centre. 'International Day' celebrates the many different nationalities and cultures that are represented in the school, through food, music and national dress.

There is a well-planned environment for children in the early years. Adults make effective use of children's experiences to build on what they know. There are opportunities to explore and be curious about the world around them. Adults check children's understanding of number and counting skills and build upon these. For example, Nursery children were adding 'paper pancakes' to count totals verbally. Reception children record these simple additions in written number sentences.

The governing body forms an enthusiastic and determined team. Governors effectively hold the school to account for areas such as safeguarding children, finance and attendance. Governor checks of curriculum areas other than mathematics, writing, early reading and science are not yet in place.

All staff who responded to Ofsted's staff questionnaire agree that they feel proud to work at the school. They appreciate the way leaders support them in managing their workload.

## Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders understand the importance of keeping children safe. There is high priority placed on staff training. Regular briefings and questions help to maintain adults' understanding of safeguarding matters. As a result, staff know how to spot signs that may worry them about a pupil's welfare, and they know how to report any concerns they may have. Leaders deal with concerns appropriately. They ensure that vulnerable pupils receive the support they need. The checks made on new staff and those that visit the school are rigorous. Governors ensure that the records of these checks are up to date and well maintained.

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

### (Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- There is an inconsistent approach to teaching reading across key stage 2. Pupils do not always read as frequently as they should, and books are not always matched to pupils' abilities. Some pupils' reading comprehension skills are not sufficiently challenged or planned for. This means that pupils are not achieving equally well across different year groups. Leaders must provide guidance so that teachers understand how to teach reading effectively and they match books with pupils' reading abilities. Leaders must check that pupils read more frequently and reading comprehension work challenges pupils.
- Subject leadership for foundation subjects is not well developed. Leaders have not given subject leads the training or resources they need to enable them to effectively lead their subjects. This means that there are inconsistencies in foundation subject leadership and gaps in pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding. Leaders should provide guidance, training and support so that subject leads can fulfil their roles effectively.
- Leaders and governors do not effectively hold the school to account for the quality of planning for learning and improvement in foundation subjects. This means that there are inconsistencies in the quality of education in these curriculum areas. Senior leaders, including the governing body, should monitor the effectiveness of foundation subject planning for improvement. Leaders must evaluate how well pupils are building their knowledge through the achievement of curricular goals in these areas.

## Background

When we have judged a school to be good, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains good. This is called a section 8 inspection of a good or non-exempt outstanding school. We do not give graded judgements on a section 8 inspection. However, if we find some evidence that standards may be declining, then the next inspection will be a section 5 inspection. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the section 8 inspection. If we have serious

concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will convert the section 8 inspection to a section 5 inspection immediately.

This is the first section 8 inspection since we judged the school to be good on 24–25 May 2016.

## **How can I feed back my views?**

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use Ofsted Parent View information when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

If you are the school and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

## **Further information**

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route.

## School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	117456
<b>Local authority</b>	Hertfordshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	10121461
<b>Type of school</b>	Primary
<b>School category</b>	Voluntary aided
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	3 to 11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	224
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair of governing body</b>	Mrs Andrea Thompson
<b>Headteacher</b>	Miss Adelaide Yarwood
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.stnicholas120.herts.sch.uk/">www.stnicholas120.herts.sch.uk/</a>
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	24–25 May 2016, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

## Information about this school

- The school is an average-sized primary school.
- The school's proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL) is within the highest 20% of all schools nationally.
- The school manages and runs a breakfast club and an after-school club.

## Information about this inspection

- I met with the headteacher, deputy headteacher, subject leaders (including the special educational needs coordinator), and other members of staff. I also spoke with a group of school governors, including the chair of the governing body. I also spoke with two representatives from the local authority.
- I observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school, including at lunchtimes. Discussions were held with different groups of pupils.
- I scrutinised a range of documentation, including the school's self-evaluation, improvement plans, governor minutes, local authority review minutes and safeguarding documents. I also evaluated information relating to pupils' behaviour and attendance.

- I had informal discussions with parents and carers as they brought children to school in the morning and considered the four letters addressed to the inspector from parents and staff. I also took account of the 74 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, as well as the 48 free-text responses.
- I looked in depth at reading, writing and history. In each subject, inspection activities included discussions with the curriculum leader, visits to lessons, discussions with teachers, scrutiny of pupils' work and discussion with pupils. I also met with curriculum leads for music, geography, art and DT and looked at pupils' work in these areas.

### **Inspection team**

Stephen Cloke, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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