

Inspection of a good school: St Nicolas CofE Primary School

Locks Hill, Portslade, Brighton, East Sussex BN41 2LA

Inspection dates: 21 and 22 September 2021

Outcome

There has been no change to this school overall judgement of good as a result of this initial (section 8) inspection. However, the evidence gathered suggests that the inspection grade might not be as high if a full inspection were carried out now. The next inspection will therefore be a full (section 5) inspection.

What is it like to attend this school?

Parents and carers say St Nicolas is a school where their children make memories. Pupils are happy here. Leaders have carefully considered aspects of school life to create enriching experiences for pupils. Parents particularly appreciate how staff 'went the extra mile' during lockdown.

Pupils like the extensive school grounds and the friendly atmosphere around school. They behave well, showing understanding for those who need a little extra support. Pupils explain how 'we help each other to stay on green' when using the behaviour system. Pupils feel safe. They learn how to stay safe in school and outside of it, including when they are online. Bullying is not an issue here.

Leaders have high expectations of all pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). For example, everyone takes part in the exuberant school films, either in front of or behind the camera. Pupils rise to these expectations. Their confidence grows as they experience success. The curriculum is interesting for pupils. However, sometimes pupils do not remember what they learn, especially in the subjects where the curriculum is being developed. Some pupils in key stage 1 are not learning to read quickly because they are struggling to master phonics.

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

All staff share leaders' vision for education at St Nicolas: to provide a rounded education that will support pupils well into adulthood. Leaders are currently developing the curriculum to support this intention.

In certain areas of the curriculum, such as mathematics, learning is carefully sequenced to build and connect knowledge for pupils. Pupils are confident mathematicians. They

remember what they have learned and confidently link their learning. This process starts in Reception Year, where children explore measures through cooking and count blocks while building high towers. Knowledge builds through the school and supports pupils to learn and remember more in mathematics.

In some subjects, which are well developed, teachers use a range of assessments, such as unaided writing and regular quizzes, to carefully match the learning to pupils needs. This helps pupils to make progress. However, not all curriculum areas are well developed. Helpful overviews have been created by leaders, but sometimes teaching sequences are not fully developed to take account of prior learning. This means that although pupils remember interesting facts, they do not always build on this as they move up through the school.

Pupils do develop a love of reading. They are read to often and talk animatedly about the books they enjoy. These books have been carefully selected to give them a wide-ranging exposure to a rich variety of texts. Pupil reading ambassadors help to further promote reading, as do trips to the library and special author days.

Leaders are introducing a new method of teaching phonics in Reception Year and key stage 1. Assessments have taken place to identify pupils' needs. Teachers are in the process of using these to match reading books carefully to each pupil. Children get off to a good start with their phonics in Reception Year. However, pupils in key stage 1 are not consistently developing the skills they need to learn to read quickly and well. Staff in key stage 1 are not yet trained to implement the phonics programme effectively.

The behaviour system works well. It is clearly understood by pupils. Those who find behaving well more difficult and describe themselves as sometimes feeling 'fizzy' are supported to learn how to regulate their behaviour. Low-level disruption is rare.

Pupils with SEND have their needs correctly identified and consistently well met. Teaching assistants are well trained and provide effective additional support where it is needed. Pupils with SEND are included in all aspects of school life. They thrive in the inclusive atmosphere. For example, many benefit from the outdoor learning programmes where they can mentor younger pupils.

Provision for pupils' broader development is of high quality. Pupils take part in polished performances and discover talents in singing, dancing, acting or film making. They learn to be kind to each other and themselves. Pupils learn about a range of different cultures and beliefs. They are respectful of the views of others.

Staff feel valued by members of the leadership team, who understand and support their needs and 'lead by example'. Staff believe their workload is considered and that what is asked of them is 'balanced and fair'. Staff at all levels feel well supported in the school; they say that it is a good place to come to work.

In discussion with the headteacher, the inspector agreed that the effectiveness of the phonics programme in key stage 1 and teaching sequences across the wider curriculum may usefully serve as a focus for the next inspection.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders and governors fulfil their safeguarding responsibilities well. Record-keeping is meticulous, including processes for recruitment. Leaders respond quickly when pupils need additional support. They work well with other agencies to keep pupils safe from harm.

Staff have had the training they need to help keep pupils safe. Parents and pupils benefit from regular internet safety information. Pupils are developing a good understanding of risk, including when online. They are confident that if they experienced any sort of harassment, staff would help them and sort it out.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Pupils in key stage 1 do not have a consistently well-implemented synthetic phonics programme in place. They are not mastering the skills they need to learn to read quickly, or to help them catch up quickly if they fall behind. Leaders should ensure that teachers have the training and support they need to implement the new phonics approach across the key stage.
- The curriculum is not consistently well sequenced. Sometimes pupils do not build on learning so that they know and remember more over time. Subject leaders should monitor the delivery of the wider curriculum to ensure that sequences of learning which build knowledge are being consistently implemented across the school.

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 outstanding school, because it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on a section 8 inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, 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 deem the section 8 inspection as a section 5 inspection immediately.

This is the first section 8 inspection since we judged the school to be good on 14 and 15 September 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 information from Ofsted Parent View 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

Unique reference number	114560
Local authority	Brighton and Hove
Inspection number	10200026
Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	420
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Katy Twyning
Headteacher	Andy Richbell
Website	www.stnicolas.brighton-hove.sch.uk/
Date of previous inspection	14 and 15 September 2016, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school became a through primary school in 2013, before the last inspection. Prior to that it was a junior school.
- The last Section 48 inspection was in 2016. The school is part of the current cycle of inspection for the diocese.
- The school does not use any alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic began. The inspector discussed the impact of the pandemic with school leaders and has taken that into account in their evaluation.
- During the inspection, the inspector met regularly with the headteacher and deputy headteacher. Meetings were also held with the special education needs coordinator, the early years lead and the safeguarding team. The inspector had a telephone call with a representative from the diocese and an online meeting with the recently retired school improvement adviser. The inspector met with a representative group from the governing body, including the chair of governors.

- The inspector did deep dives in reading, mathematics and history. For each deep dive, inspectors met with subject leaders, looked at curriculum plans, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- The inspector also scrutinised documentation around curriculum planning.
- Records associated with safeguarding were reviewed, including the single central record and appointment procedures. The inspector spoke to staff about their safeguarding training and spoke to pupils about the support they have in understanding how to keep safe. The inspector spoke to a group of parents and reviewed responses to the staff, pupil and parent Ofsted questionnaires to gather views on safeguarding.
- Groups of staff met with the inspector to share their views about the school, including on workload and well-being. The inspector completed a tour of the school with pupils and spoke to them on the playground and in the dining hall. The inspector viewed some of the films made by pupils.

Inspection team

Deborah Gordon, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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