

Inspection of a good school: St Nicholas School

Philpott Avenue, Southend-on-Sea, Essex SS2 4RL

Inspection dates:

2 and 3 February 2022

Outcome

St Nicholas School continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils know that staff care for them and are interested in them as an individual. They are positive about school. Many have had periods of absence in their education before coming here but now have good attendance.

Pupils are really interested in the topics they are taught about. They talk excitedly about what they have learned and can apply it to different situations. Pupils are motivated by teachers to practise the key skills of reading, writing and mathematics. Pupils access a good range of specialist facilities for subjects, including science, physical education, art and computing. They receive a broad curriculum, and most pupils move on to highly appropriate next steps in their education or training.

The curriculum is enhanced by a wide range of extra-curricular clubs and activities. They have many visitors in to talk about current learning topics, possible careers and college choices.

Behaviour is of a high standard. Pupils know what to do if they are upset or angry. Staff support pupils well in a positive way to develop strategies to get back to learning quickly. Where pupils feel that they are bullied or that others are mean to them, they are confident that staff will help sort this out quickly.

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

In the last three years, leaders have rewritten the curriculum for all subjects in the school. Leaders have designed a curriculum that ensures all pupils access a full range of subjects through a topic-based approach. These topics or 'quests', such as 'Bombs Away' or 'I'm Only Human' are well thought out and are matched closely to the age, abilities and needs of pupils in the school.

Within each quest, leaders have ensured that there are sufficient content and learning experiences to cover a broad range of subjects, such as history, geography, art, music,

physical education, science and many more. The curriculum for the development of pupils' personal, social and health education (PSHE) is a strength in the school's work. This supports pupils to develop positive relationships and is flexible to the changing needs of pupils as they grow older. This curriculum is enhanced by a range of visitors and trips.

Leaders have put in place an effective monitoring system to review the teaching of English, mathematics and social skills. They routinely monitor how pupils are faring in these subjects against the intended curriculum and pupils' individualised targets. There are not yet full systems in place for leaders to check with the same precision how pupils are faring against the intended curriculum in other subjects.

Leaders have ensured that reading material links directly to the planned curriculum. Pupils read, discuss and write about what they have read. Some pupils arrive in the school with good reading skills. Teachers make sure there are books that will interest them and are effective in developing other skills in reading, such as inference and comprehension.

A small but increasing number of pupils are arriving at the school at a very early stage of reading. These have individualised programmes organised by their class teacher to help them learn to read. While pupils learn to read effectively, these strategies are not used confidently by all teachers as pupils change classes or as they get older. As a result, teachers are not delivering some of these reading strategies as well as they could in every lesson.

Leaders ensure that pupils are given a voice in the decisions made about their education, health and future plans. Pupils feel real ownership of their annual review meetings and take part in organising them. Leaders seek timely and relevant information from all appropriate professionals and use these reviews well to form individual plans for pupils. Plans for pupils' transition to adulthood are well considered in these meetings and the curriculum. Pupils learn about different careers and life skills throughout the school. As they get ready to move on to the next stage of education, all pupils experience appropriate work experience that matches their abilities and interests. Leaders work closely with parents and a range of external professionals to identify the right courses and provision for pupils.

Pupils have access to a wide range of extra-curricular clubs, including coding, dodgeball and cookery. Most pupils are eligible for the pupil premium grant. Leaders use this funding well to allow those pupils to access music lessons, residentials and outdoor experiences.

Leaders share the same vision and values. Staff feel well supported and share good practice, for example around making behaviour approaches consistent. As a result, pupils are rarely excluded and are supported to succeed.

In discussion with the headteacher, the inspectors agreed that leaders' monitoring of the implementation of the planned curriculum and the development of consistent approaches to the teaching of early reading for the increasing number of pupils with this need may usefully serve as a focus for the next inspection.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders work closely with a range of external agencies to make sure that pupils are kept safe. They have comprehensive knowledge of pupils' needs and their record-keeping is detailed. Staff have regular training on how to keep pupils safe. By regularly checking in with each pupil about how they are feeling, staff pick up on pupils' worries quickly. Leaders undertake appropriate and thorough checks of the few alternative provisions used by the school.

Pupils feel safe, they know adults they can talk to. Leaders ensure that individuals and classes have the right teaching, for example about e-safety, as and when issues arise, to be able to keep themselves safe. This complements the comprehensive PSHE programme.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Leaders check that pupils have learned the intended curriculum in English, mathematics and social skills. They also monitor the progress against each pupil's individual education, health and care plan. However, leaders' monitoring of the wider curriculum is less well developed. Leaders do not know precisely how well teachers are delivering some aspects of the wider curriculum and where it may need amendment. Leaders need to develop systems to check the quality of the provision for the wider curriculum.
- A small but increasing number enter the school unable to read well. Teachers use a range of strategies to help them catch up, including phonics. However, some teachers are less confident in how to use these strategies to help these pupils catch up. Leaders need to ensure there are consistent approaches in place and that teachers are trained in the school's chosen strategy for early reading.

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 predecessor school, St Nicholas School, to be good in March 2014.

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	144691
Local authority	Southend-on-Sea
Inspection number	10212031
Type of school	Special
School category	Academy special converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	88
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Barry Levitt
Headteacher	Laura Fox
Website	www.stnicholas-school.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- This school provides education for pupils with moderate learning difficulties and/or autism spectrum disorder. All pupils have an education, health and care plan.
- The school reopened as an academy on 1 September 2017. It is part of the SEN Trust Southend.
- The proportion of pupils eligible for the pupil premium grant is well above average.
- The school uses alternative providers for a small number of pupils as part of their weekly curriculum provision.

Information about this inspection

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- The inspectors met with the headteacher, senior leaders and the multi-academy trust chief executive officer. They also met with a range of staff and pupils. An inspector spoke to a representative of the local authority and members of the local governing body.

- Inspectors carried out deep dives in reading, mathematics and art and design. 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.
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of pupils' individual plans and examples of work from across the curriculum.
- To inspect safeguarding, inspectors checked the single central record, looked at examples of safeguarding records and spoke to staff and pupils.
- Inspectors took into account 23 responses to the staff survey and 16 responses to the parent survey.

Inspection team

Tessa Holledge, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Pauline MacMillan

Ofsted Inspector

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