

Inspection of a good school: St Nicholas C of E VA Primary School

Church Green, Harpenden, Hertfordshire AL5 2TP

Inspection date:

24 March 2022

Outcome

St Nicholas C of E VA Primary School continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

St Nicholas is a very happy school. Pupils are polite, friendly, and enthusiastic about learning. In the playground, they like talking about what they know. Parents praise the 'balance' between 'the nurturing environment' and 'fostering a love of learning'.

Pupils appreciate the safe and caring community that leaders create. Pupils adopt the school's values, such as kindness and responsibility. This starts in the early years, where children quickly learn to take turns and share. When pupils move in from other schools, they feel welcomed. Pupils treat their peers with respect. They say that bullying is rare. If there are issues, pupils trust leaders to resolve them.

Behaviour is calm. In lessons there is a purposeful atmosphere. Play at breaktimes is a lot of fun. Pupils respond well to the high expectations and clear routines that leaders set.

Pupils develop their learning and characters through a wide range of opportunities. Older pupils become 'ambassadors' for important aspects of the school, such as reading and sport. Pupils can go to several clubs, for instance mindfulness, street dancing, chess, and girls' football. They describe excitedly what they learn from trips, such as about gravity at a science fair.

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

Leaders have put in place a curriculum that meets the needs of the pupils at the school. In most areas of the curriculum, leaders identify what pupils should learn and when. From early years through to Year 6, teachers are knowledgeable and implement these plans well. This means that pupils confidently build up what they know and can do over time. In a few areas, such as history, leaders do not plan the knowledge pupils need to know as precisely. This means teachers are occasionally less clear about what should be taught and when. Pupils sometimes do not make all the connections they should between different parts of their learning.

Teachers use assessment well. They check on pupils' understanding effectively and adapt what comes next, where needed. Teachers revisit prior learning regularly, for example during the catch-up sessions called 'buffer time'. This helps pupils remember what they learn. As a result, pupils develop their confidence in their learning, such as their fluency in mathematics.

In general, by the end of Year 6, pupils learn to read fluently. Pupils benefit from how leaders promote a love of reading. This includes for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Older pupils talk about their books with pleasure. Leaders liaise well with parents to help them support their children's reading. Leaders ensure that pupils read books they can understand. However, while teachers are effective at teaching phonics, not all staff who support pupils with phonics are well trained. Some staff, on occasion, do not correct misconceptions well. This means some younger readers do not learn to read quite as quickly as they should. Leaders know this is an urgent issue to rectify and have plans to do so.

Pupils with SEND get effective support. Leaders and staff are knowledgeable about pupils' needs and adapt activities to ensure that pupils access the same curriculum as others. For example, teachers set up a woodwork project to help early years children with SEND with their physical development. Pupils with SEND access the full curriculum successfully and achieve well.

Leaders have developed a well-considered policy for behaviour. Staff understand this and apply it consistently. Pupils therefore face very few distractions to learning.

Leaders make sure the curriculum teaches pupils about a rapidly changing world. Pupils learn about aspects of life in modern Britain, such as democracy. They develop thoughtful views about why it is better to choose one's leader than to have a dictator. Pupils read books in class that help them think deeply about current affairs, such as about why wars occur.

Staff are very positive about the collaborative culture of the school. They say their workload is considered helpfully. Staff praise the way leaders adapt plans to support their well-being.

Governors ensure they have the knowledge and skills they need to do their role effectively. They ask leaders thoughtful and probing questions about the curriculum. Governors understand the importance of their safeguarding role and are rigorous regarding this. They place a high focus on pupil and staff well-being, including that of leaders. As a result, leaders are well supported in their work.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

There is a strong culture of safeguarding. This is supported by a caring and diligent pastoral care focus. Leaders know the risks that children face. While there have not been many significant safeguarding cases, leaders remain vigilant. They keep thorough and clear records of cases.

Staff are well trained. They know how to spot and record concerns, and logs of cases show how watchful they have been in doing this.

Leaders consider online risks carefully and teach children effectively through the curriculum how to watch out for these. Pupils feel safe, and parents and staff agree.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Not all staff who support pupils with their reading are confident in teaching phonics. Some younger pupils could be learning to read quicker than they are. Leaders must ensure that all staff are trained effectively so they know how to support early readers well.
- In a few areas of the curriculum, leaders do not meticulously identify and assess the knowledge pupils should learn. On occasion, pupils do not develop a deep knowledge or understanding, and so do not make as many connections between the different things they learn, as they should. Leaders must plan the curriculum equally well in all subjects, and ensure that teachers deliver this as leaders intend.

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 second section 8 inspection since we judged the school to be good in November 2012.

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	117434
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10211516
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	147
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Caroline Fleming
Headteacher	Rizelle Crouch
Website	www.stnicholasce.org
Date of previous inspection	1 March 2017, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- St Nicholas C of E VA Primary School leaders do not use any alternative providers.
- The school has a Christian character. The religious aspects of the school's provision were last inspected on 30 November 2017 under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005.

Information about this inspection

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. The inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school, and have taken that into account in their evaluation.
- Inspectors held meetings with senior leaders, other leaders, staff, pupils, and those responsible for governance.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early 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. In early reading, this took the form of listening to pupils read to a familiar adult.

- Inspectors also looked at curriculum plans and spoke to leaders about some other subjects, particularly art, French and science.
- As part of the evaluation of the school's safeguarding processes, inspectors reviewed the school's single central record, and met with the designated safeguarding lead.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of school documents, including the school self-evaluation form and improvement plan, curriculum plans and school policies.
- Inspectors reviewed the 51 responses that were submitted by parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and also considered the 51 free-text responses from parents. The inspector also considered 24 responses to the Ofsted staff's survey and 82 responses to the pupils' survey.

Inspection team

Charlie Fordham, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

James Chester

Her Majesty's Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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