

Inspection of a good school: St Nicholas School

Reedham Drive, Purley, Surrey CR8 4DS

Inspection dates:

8 and 9 February 2023

Outcome

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

What is it like to attend this school?

St Nicholas School is a kind and welcoming place. Staff go out of their way to understand and support the unique qualities and needs of every pupil. They want pupils in the school to be the best they can be.

Pupils gain confidence, make friends and enjoy their education. The warm and trusting relationships that staff foster with pupils ensure that pupils feel safe. Parents and carers inspectors spoke to agreed that their children flourish here.

Pupils benefit from having access to extensive new facilities, and well-resourced outdoor areas at breaktimes.

Staff know that pupils' behaviour communicates their needs and moods. Pupils' inappropriate behaviour is not deliberate, and they have no intention to threaten or harass others. As a result, bullying is exceptionally rare. Staff know pupils extremely well and are able to pick up on even the smallest clues to help avoid problems even before they happen.

Parents are full of praise for the school and its leadership. A typical comment made by parents was, 'It feels like the staff are raising my child with me.' Parents have seen many changes since the new headteacher took over. They said they feel more involved in the school, and that leaders are helpful, accessible and responsive.

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

Since the last inspection, there has not only been a new headteacher, but the school has moved into a new building. The cohort of pupils attending the school has also changed. Now, many more pupils who come to the school have more complex needs, including

severe learning difficulties. Leaders are adapting the curriculum in response to this change in cohort.

In English and mathematics, leaders have set out the essential knowledge, skills and understanding that pupils need to learn in the long term. This provides a carefully sequenced curriculum that teachers use for half-termly assessments. However, teachers do not consistently use this structure or the assessments to design learning. Consequently, learning does not build over time and pupils do not receive the help they need to know and remember more as they move through the school.

Pupils' personal development is a large part of school life. This aspect of the curriculum is carefully planned. Leaders provide an extensive range of activities which help to develop pupils' understanding of the wider world. They enable pupils to develop the knowledge and skills they need to achieve a healthy lifestyle and positive relationships. Pupils are clear about how they use the skills they learn when they are not at school.

Pupils who are non-verbal are sometimes not provided with suitable communication systems. This means that these pupils are reliant on verbal instruction in lessons and have no means of expressing themselves to others. Teachers know the importance of developing vocabulary. Staff ensure that symbols are everywhere in the school. These symbols are the means by which many pupils express themselves. However, despite this, adult support in the use of symbols for developing language is inconsistent. The newly appointed speech and language therapist has a detailed understanding of what needs to be in place to assist pupils' communication and language development.

Teachers help pupils to enjoy reading. Most pupils acquire reliable reading skills. However, there are some variations in phonics teaching which leaders are rightly keen to address. These variations arise because some staff lack the subject knowledge needed to teach phonics consistently well.

In the early years, children are well supported to settle in. They learn about expectations of behaviour through play and social interaction.

Leaders have changed their approach to behaviour management. This has been successful in increasing the engagement of pupils and reducing the frequency of incidents of unacceptable behaviour. Many pupils have learned to identify when they are feeling unsettled, and they are often able to manage their own behaviour well. This ensures that learning time is rarely lost.

Governors are knowledgeable and highly supportive of the work of the school. Staff are very positive and passionate about their work. They appreciate the support the school leaders give them. They say that leaders care about their well-being and are considerate of their workload.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders have ensured that the school has a strong safeguarding culture. The members of the experienced staff team are knowledgeable about pupils' particular vulnerabilities and behaviours that might put them at increased risk. There are very close links between safeguarding leaders and pupils' families.

Staff work with pupils to help them understand online risks.

Staff receive high-quality training in safeguarding and regular updates. Staff understand their responsibility to report any concern. Concerns are recorded in a timely manner and tenaciously followed up with the appropriate agencies when needed. Leaders have appropriate procedures in place to manage any allegations.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The teaching of early reading is not as good as it needs to be. This means that pupils at the early stages of reading do not learn to read fluently as well as they could. Leaders should make sure that all staff receive the right training to develop their expertise in this area.
- Sometimes teachers do not design learning that is linked well to the long-term aims of subject curriculums. This means that some aspects of pupils' learning are not well sequenced. Leaders should ensure that teachers are supported effectively, to design learning so that pupils build on their prior knowledge in logical steps. This will help pupils to achieve the aims outlined in subject curriculums and to deepen their knowledge and understanding of subjects over time.
- Some non-verbal pupils do not have a consistent communication system in place. This means that some pupils are reliant on verbal instruction in lessons, and have no means of telling staff what they have learned. Leaders should make sure that all pupils have opportunities throughout the day to develop and practice their expressive and receptive communication skills.

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 an ungraded inspection, and it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection, which is carried out under section 5 of the Act. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the ungraded inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

This is the second ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be good in May 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.

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	101854
Local authority	Croydon
Inspection number	10255523
Type of school	Special
School category	Maintained
Age range of pupils	4 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	245
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Bernie Tetchner
Headteacher	Katie Goodwin
Website	st-nicholas.croydon.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	6 June 2017, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school caters for pupils with moderate or severe learning difficulties. Many pupils have communication difficulties or a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder.
- All pupils have an education, health and care plan.
- 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 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- During the inspection, inspectors held discussions with the headteacher and other leaders, including curriculum and pastoral leaders.
- Inspectors held discussions with teachers, teaching assistants and governors.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in early reading, history, and personal, social and health education. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about

their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. Inspectors also spoke to leaders about the curriculum in some other subjects.

- Inspectors met with members of staff individually and in groups and spoke to pupils at various points during the inspection. Inspectors took account of responses to pupil and staff surveys, as well as Ofsted Parent View.
- Inspectors looked at records relating to behaviour, bullying, attendance and safeguarding.
- Inspectors reviewed safeguarding arrangements by checking the school's approach to staff recruitment, scrutinising policy documents and meeting with the designated safeguarding lead.

Inspection team

Francis Gonzalez, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Teresa Neary

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