

Inspection of St Nicholas CofE (VA) Primary School and Nursery

Six Hills Way, Stevenage, Hertfordshire SG2 0PZ

Inspection dates:

22 and 23 February 2023

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Good

Personal development

Good

Leadership and management

Requires improvement

Early years provision

Good

Previous inspection grade

Good

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils are happy and safe at St Nicholas. The shared values of the school ensure that pupils feel a part of the school community. Pupils look after and include each other during lessons and on the school playground. The diverse backgrounds of pupils are something that is celebrated, and pupils are proud to 'come from lots of different places but make one big family'.

The behaviour of pupils around the school and in lessons is good. Typically, pupils listen well to adults. Bullying is very rare at school. When it happens, staff are quick to deal with it. Pupils enjoy and appreciate the opportunities leaders provide them to have a say at school. A range of responsibilities are available to pupils, such as being prefects or digital leaders.

Pupils work hard in lessons to reach the expectations staff have of them. Children in the early years make a strong start to school. They settle quickly into school life and develop the language and mathematical knowledge they need ready for Year 1. However, as pupils move through the school, there are inconsistencies in the quality of education they receive across subjects and across classes. This means there are gaps in pupils' knowledge that leaders have not identified and corrected.

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

Leaders have designed a curriculum that sets out the important knowledge pupils will learn. Teachers use broad overviews to plan lessons and activities for pupils. In some subjects, leaders have provided additional guidance and support for staff to do this. For example, in computing, leaders have carefully identified the resources and activities for teachers to use. Leaders support teachers with their subject knowledge. Pupils experience lessons which coherently build on what they already know.

This is, however, not the case in most subjects. Leaders have not ensured that staff training and support, and leaders' monitoring of how well pupils are faring in the curriculum, are as effective as they should be. This leads to variations in the quality of education that pupils' experience. Some teachers do not use assessment effectively to check what pupils know and can do. Teachers plan activities that do not take account of what pupils already know and can do. Where this happens, teachers do not identify where pupils have misconceptions or make errors. All of this leads to gaps in pupils' knowledge.

Leaders have recently introduced a new approach to the teaching of phonics. They have provided training for staff. Staff, overall, teach phonics effectively. Pupils who find reading hard receive the support they need to develop both their confidence and their fluency. Pupils at the early stages of reading achieve well. There have been some improvements in the reading provision in key stage 2. However, leaders have not planned the reading curriculum in key stage 2 in sufficient detail. As a

result, pupils experience a varied reading offer between classes. They do not experience as rich or broad a reading offer as they should.

In the early years, there is a well-planned curriculum that builds on what children already know and can do. Stories, language and rich discussions support children to develop their vocabulary from a young age. Carefully planned activities develop the knowledge of children across different areas of learning. Leaders have provided clear guidance and support for staff in the early years to teach the planned curriculum well. This supports staff to use assessment to carefully adapt the activities they ask children to complete. Children are well prepared for key stage 1.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) receive effective support. This is because leaders provide guidance and training for staff in how to support pupils with SEND. Careful adaptations and use of resources help pupils with SEND to access the curriculum. While this provides support for pupils with SEND, they experience the same deficiencies in the curriculum as their peers.

Leaders provide pupils with a range of different opportunities. For example, all pupils learn to play the violin. Trips and visitors to the school further enrich the curriculum. They also teach pupils more about the planned curriculum. A recent visit to the school by a local magistrate taught pupils more about the concept of justice. The curriculum also teaches pupils about valuing the differences between people. Pupils are confident and comfortable talking about this.

There have been significant changes to governance. Most governors are new to role. There is a determination among governors to support and hold leaders to account for the provision pupils receive. Although this has happened in some areas, such as safeguarding, it is not in apparent in the curriculum.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders complete all required pre-employment checks on new adults in the school. The curriculum teaches pupils how to keep safe online. Pupils have a secure understanding of this. There are clear systems in place for recording concerns about pupils. Staff understand these systems and use them consistently. Leaders ensure that staff receive regular training so they have the knowledge they need to identify any pupil who may be at risk of harm. Leaders seek support from external professionals when they need to, so that pupils and families receive the help they need.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The reading curriculum in key stage 2 is not as coherently sequenced as it should be. This leads to variation in the quality of the reading provision for older pupils. Leaders must ensure they precisely identify what pupils must read, know and remember across key stage 2. They must then ensure that staff teach reading well, so that pupils have more opportunities to experience a wider and more varied reading curriculum.
- In many subjects, there are inconsistencies in how effectively the planned curriculum is taught and assessed. This is because there is not precise guidance from leaders on how to teach and assess the curriculum across these subjects. Pupils have gaps in their knowledge and misconceptions which staff do not address. Leaders must ensure that they provide staff with the support and guidance they need to teach and assess the planned curriculum consistently well, so that pupils develop a better understanding of what leaders want them to know and remember.
- There is not an agreed approach towards monitoring the quality of the curriculum across all subjects. This means subject leaders do not all have a detailed understanding of what needs improving in their subjects. Leaders must ensure there is a rigorous and robust approach towards monitoring the curriculum, so that staff are held to account when it is not taught as effectively as it should be.
- There have been significant changes to membership of the governing body. Most governors are new to role. While there is a determination to support and hold leaders to account, this is not in place across all areas of the curriculum. Governors must ensure they are able to rigorously and robustly hold staff to account for the quality of education in the school.

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	117456
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10255017
Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	3 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	221
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Ellin Joseph and Karen Mitchell (co-chairs)
Headteacher	Lorraine Collins
Website	www.stnicholas120.herts.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	25 and 26 February 2020, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- There have been many changes to staff since the previous inspection. The headteacher took up post in September 2022.
- There have been significant changes to governance. The co-chairs of the governing body took up post in February 2023.
- The school's most recent inspection of its religious character under section 48 of the Education Act was in March 2017 and it will receive its next inspection within eight years of that date.
- The school does not make use of any alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- 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.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics, computing and design technology. For each deep dive, they discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke with teachers, spoke with pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. The lead inspector also listened to pupils read. Inspectors reviewed curriculum plans and examples of pupils' workbooks in geography and science.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors scrutinised safeguarding policies, the school's record of background checks of adults at the school, and a sample of child protection files. They also spoke with governors, the designated safeguarding lead and staff about safeguarding practices at the school.
- Inspectors held meetings with the headteacher, the special educational needs coordinator, the designated safeguarding lead, subject leaders, staff, governors, a representative from the local authority, and pupils.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of documents, including behaviour logs, bullying records, attendance records, pupil records, minutes of governing body meetings, school development plans, local authority visit notes and school policies.
- There were 31 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, which were considered.
- Inspectors considered 13 responses to Ofsted's questionnaire for pupils. They also spoke with pupils throughout the inspection to gather their views.
- There were 21 responses to Ofsted's questionnaire for school staff. Inspectors also spoke with staff throughout the inspection to gather their views and considered written correspondence received.

Inspection team

Michael Williams, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Sam Nixon

Ofsted Inspector

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