

St Nicholas School

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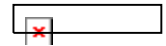
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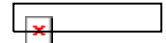
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Introduction and summary

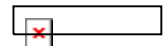


Purpose and scope of the inspection



This inspection was carried out by the Office for Standards in Education under Section 163 of the Education Act 2002 in order to advise the Secretary of State for Education and Skills about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

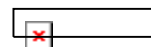
Information about the school



St Nicholas School is a small, independent day school in Kingsbury, north-west London. It is non-denominational and caters for boys and girls between the ages of two and eleven. At the time of the inspection, 75 pupils were on roll, including nine who attend part-time. None of the pupils has been identified as having a statement of special educational needs (SEN). Most of the pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds; almost all of them are fluent in English but also use their mother tongue at home.

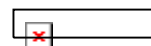
The school was established in 1937 and was acquired by a new proprietor in 1997, at which time the current headteacher was appointed. The school's main aim is to ensure that the pupils are well equipped to perform to the best of their ability in examinations for selection to secondary schools. The school seeks to establish a family atmosphere and provide a balanced education which promotes the pupils' personal, social and physical development as well as their academic skills.

Summary of main findings



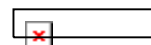
St Nicholas School provides a warm and welcoming environment for its pupils. It provides a satisfactory quality of education, although there is scope for some aspects of the teaching to be improved. The pupils enjoy school and the small class sizes mean that they receive plenty of individual attention. The curriculum is broad and offers the pupils a good range of subjects, although too little attention is given to information and communication technology (ICT). The school meets its aim to prepare the pupils well for entry to secondary education.

What the school does well



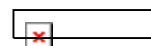
- it creates a family atmosphere which helps the pupils to develop self-confidence and good attitudes towards schooling;
- it provides a good quality of education in the nursery;
- it has devised and implemented a very good programme for pupils' personal development; and
- it achieves good academic standards in English, mathematics and science.

What the school must do in order to comply with the regulations



- improve the quality of planning for lessons as noted in section 1 of the report;
- ensure that additions to the building meet the requirements of the fire safety officer and that the policy for educational visits is updated as indicated in section 3;
- ensure that there are sufficient washbasins and toilets for the pupils as identified in section 5; and
- ensure that the complaints procedure addresses the issues identified in section 7.

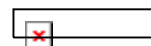
What the school must do to comply with the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 2002



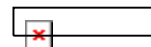
In order to comply with the requirements of the DDA, the school should:

- devise a three-year plan to improve the accessibility of the premises.

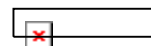
Compliance with the regulations for registration



1. The quality of education provided by the school



The quality of the curriculum



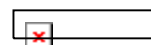
The curriculum meets all the requirements for registration. In accordance with its aims, the school pays close attention to the curriculum for English and mathematics and lessons in these subjects are given a high priority throughout the school. Nevertheless, the school achieves a good balance between subjects and the pupils' work reflects the range of subjects taught. These include science, art and technology, history, geography, religious education, physical education and music. French has been added recently to each week's work for pupils in reception and Years 1 to 6. In addition, the school strives successfully to promote the pupils' personal development. Visits out of school add meaning to the curriculum and help to make the learning memorable for the pupils. A recent residential visit, organised to give pupils a chance to experience some adventurous activities, led to work in a range of subjects. Pupils wrote accounts of their favourite activities and drew graphs to show which were the most popular.

The curriculum is very well planned and caters appropriately for the two year groups in each class in Key Stages 1 and 2. Plans show the content of the curriculum for each subject, the aims and objectives for the teaching and what the pupils are expected to learn. Teaching methods are suggested and plans explain how homework might be used and where opportunities might be provided for the pupils to work independently or use their initiative. For example, lunchtime lessons in speech and elocution are voluntary, giving the pupils the opportunity to make their own decisions about attending. Different subjects are linked successfully to make the content of the curriculum more meaningful for the pupils. The schemes of work for personal, social, health, citizenship and religious education are exemplary. Strong links are forged between these subjects to provide a coherent programme for each class. For example, the pupils follow a programme of study that includes topics in Years 1 and 2 on balanced diet, and in Years 5 and 6 on the environment, local democracy and, in preparation for a move to secondary education, on 'moving on'. While resources for most subjects are satisfactory, those for ICT are limited and restrict learning in the subject.

Pupils in the nursery and reception classes benefit from a good curriculum that is based on national guidance for pupils of their age. It includes all the recommended areas of learning and addresses the goals associated with each of them. The curriculum, which is set out in detail, gives the pupils a sound start in acquiring key skills in language, literacy and numeracy, while giving them a good introduction to the routines of schooling and preparing them for the next stages of their education. Resources for learning in the nursery and reception class are in good supply and the outdoor area is used successfully to add further dimensions to different aspects of the curriculum.

Although the school has very few pupils with SEN, provision is made to support those who need extra help to boost their learning. Such help often occurs during lessons when teachers find time to sit with pupils and provide further and more detailed explanations of the work in hand.

The quality of the teaching and assessment



The quality of teaching is satisfactory overall. The pupils who attend St Nicholas School come from many different backgrounds and the teaching ensures that pupils of all ages achieve well. The teaching was good in around half the lessons observed. Some of the teaching methods used are very effective and help the pupils to make good progress. Their progress is slower in lessons that concentrate on the completion of tasks, rather than on what the pupils are to learn.

Although there are examples of very well planned lessons, the overall quality of lesson planning is not good enough to meet the requirements for registration. Documentation about the curriculum includes good advice for teachers, but it is only in the best lessons that this valuable information is translated into suitably detailed plans for lessons. For example, plans for a geography lesson in Years 5 and 6 described precisely what the pupils were expected to learn, the teaching methods to be used, the geographical vocabulary to be taught, and a task for the pupils to complete at home. While such planning is replicated in some other lessons, notably in history and French, this is not the case across the school. Plans often lack details about the precise objectives for what the pupils should learn during the lesson and, on occasion, the work is pitched at a too high a level. The range of tasks given to the pupils is narrow and, in some lessons, the focus is too much on what the pupils will do rather than what they are expected to learn. For example, opportunities for pupils to use ICT are limited. While the school has recently established a suite of computers, they were used infrequently during the inspection.

Classes are small and the teachers know the pupils well. Relationships between pupils and teachers are good. Pupils are consequently confident about discussing their work and asking for help when they need it. Teachers keep a watchful eye on pupils' progress during lessons and act promptly to help them if they are struggling. For example, in a mathematics lesson for pupils in Year 5, one pupil developed a clear understanding of negative numbers as a result of individual attention to resolve some misunderstandings.

Teachers are ambitious for the pupils to do well. The pupils say that they really enjoy lessons and that they find the work interesting. Visits out of school provide a focal point for some of the most interesting work, based on first-hand experience of places of interest both locally and further afield. The pupils' very good attitudes to work and their commitment to try their best make a good contribution to many lessons. They are alert in response to teachers' questions which are often carefully framed to develop the pupils' understanding and make them think.

The seven full-time and five part-time teachers and instructors together provide wide experience and who have expertise in subjects such as music, French and sport. Teachers are encouraged to attend courses but these have mainly focused on education in the early years and whole school issues. It would now be beneficial for teachers to attend courses with a view to broadening their teaching strategies.

The school has good arrangements for checking progress through regular tests of pupils' knowledge and assessments of their work. Effective use is made of National Curriculum tests at the end of Key Stages 1 and 2 and the pupils are given appropriate opportunities to practise the types of tests that they will take for entrance examinations for secondary schools. Some teachers use marking skilfully to give pupils advice on how they might improve their work. Some of the marking is done during lessons; this often leads to helpful discussions with pupils to clarify points of difficulty.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

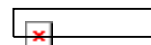
The school meets most but not all the requirements.

What does the school need to do to comply with the regulations?

In order to comply with the Independent Schools Standards Regulations 2003 the school should:

- improve the quality of lesson plans and broaden the range of teaching methods (paragraph 1(3) (c)).

2. The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils



The school makes good provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. It provides a welcoming, caring environment where pupils feel safe and happy. As one Year 6 pupil said, 'the school gives you a cosy feeling and it's like being at home'. The good religious education (RE) curriculum helps to raise pupils' spiritual awareness. Pupils learn about the major world religions and celebrate the major festivals. Consequently they are sensitive to each others' individuality and respect their differences. This results in a friendly school where pupils feel valued and develop a strong sense of self-worth.

Pupils behave sensibly in and around school. They have a good sense of right and wrong and relationships are very good. Pupils learn to take responsibility through their different jobs as class monitors and the head boy is respected by all. Year 6 pupils, who are all prefects, have a deep sense of responsibility. They develop into confident individuals who are constantly taking care of the younger pupils in the school. These pupils see it as their responsibility to maintain the school's good ethos. Despite the small playground, pupils play sensibly and show consideration to each other. In some classes, awards are given to encourage good work but as they get older the pupils are content with the praise or otherwise from their teachers and aim for awards at speech day.

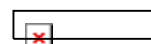
Religious and cultural diversity is respected. Pupils are aware of each others' differences and show acceptance and understanding of them. They celebrate festivals such as Diwali and Eid as well as observing Christian customs and traditions. Pupils are also made aware of British cultural traditions through work on festivals such as Hallowe'en and Bonfire Night. They learn about public institutions through visits to the library and they take part in a local health and safety scheme.

The school's caring philosophy underpins the provision for pupils' personal development. The wide range of topics covered in personal, social and health education, such as drugs misuse and personal health and safety help to ensure that pupils are fully prepared for life in today's society and the next stage in their education.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes

3. The welfare, health and safety of the pupils



The school nurtures its pupils carefully, placing strong emphasis on their welfare, health and safety. Effective policies have been written to prevent bullying and to encourage good behaviour. They are both proactive and reactive. For example, they clearly indicate the levels of behaviour that are expected as well as the sanctions to be used in the rare event of unacceptable behaviour occurring. Pupils report that staff deal quickly with any minor instances of misbehaviour.

All adults in the school have attended training in child protection and First Aid. The importance of pupils' well-being on out-of-school visits and activities is given a high priority and the school has a detailed policy that clearly outlines the action to be taken in regard to off-site activities. The school has not yet updated its policy on educational visits.

Prior to the addition of the new reception class and some covered passageways, the school met all

fire safety requirements. However, because of these additions, the school has arranged for the local fire safety officer to re-inspect the building. This is due to take place during the week following the inspection and the school will notify the DfES of its actions in the light of any recommendations made by the fire officer. Fire drills are held regularly and recorded together with appropriate notes to indicate where improvements can be made.

Pupils are supervised closely while on the school premises. Attendance is very good. The school has recently updated the admission register and the attendance registers in line with requirements. However, some alterations in the admission register had been made inappropriately using correcting fluid.

The school does not have a written policy to outline its planned provision to meet the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 2002 (DDA).

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

No.

What does the school need to do to comply with the regulations?

In order to comply with the Independent Schools Standards Regulations 2003 the school should:

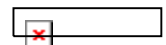
- revise its policy on school visits to take due regard of the DfES guidance 'Health and Safety of Pupils on Educational Visits' (paragraph 3(2)(c)); and
- ensure that the school has a satisfactory level of fire safety by implementing any recommendations by the fire safety officer in the light of the new building work that has taken place. (paragraph 3(5)).

What does the school need to do to comply with the DDA?

In order to comply with the requirements of the DDA the school should:

- devise a three-year plan to improve the accessibility of the premises.

4. The suitability of the proprietor and staff

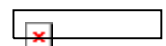


The school is owned by the 'Happy Child Ltd' group. The day-to-day running of the school, including the nursery, is the responsibility of the headteacher. The school has sound procedures for the appointment of staff which include all the appropriate checks to ensure their suitability to work with pupils. The school does not allow any adult to work alone with pupils if they have not been cleared by the Criminal Records Bureau.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

5. The suitability of the premises and accommodation



The school is housed in a large converted house in a residential district of Kingsbury and is wholly suitable for its purpose. The classrooms are adequate for the present numbers of pupils. They are well maintained and kept clean and tidy. They are enhanced by attractive displays of pupils' work. There are, however, insufficient toilets for the number of pupils in the nursery class and not enough wash-hand basins for boys of compulsory school age.

Effective use has been made of the outdoor play space available. Most of the space is covered by a safety surface. There is some good outdoor fixed play equipment, provided by the parents' association. The school has a good range of large outdoor toys such as tricycles for pupils in the Foundation Stage. There is a small grassed area but this is not suitable for ball games including football and hockey. The school uses a local church hall and a nearby park to enhance both the physical education curriculum and outdoor play activities.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

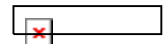
The school meets all but one of the requirements.

What does the school need to do to comply with the regulations?

In order to comply with the Independent Schools Standards Regulations 2003 the school should:

- ensure that there are sufficient toilets for pupils in the nursery and enough wash hand basins for boys of compulsory school age (paragraph 5(k)).

6. The quality of information for parents and other partners



The school meets all the requirements for registration relating to the provision of information. The prospectus includes a good range of information for parents and prospective parents. The school's aims and ethos are described clearly along with the cornerstones of the curriculum and its stance on discipline and behaviour. The prospectus is replicated in the school's section of the 'Happy Child Ltd' website.

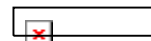
Reports to parents on pupils' progress are written each term. Many of these not only give useful information about progress and standards achieved, but also suggest where further effort or improvement is needed. The school has amended its arrangements from the beginning of the current school year to organise termly meetings between teachers and parents to discuss progress. Many parents also avail themselves of the school's willingness to discuss matters of concern as they arise. Newsletters provide helpful information about forthcoming events and report on the success of trips and special occasions in school.

Although some parents disagreed that they were kept well informed about their children's progress, the inspection found no evidence to support this view. The school provides a good level of information.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

7. The effectiveness of the school's procedures for handling complaints



The school has prepared suitable procedures for handling complaints, but not all parents are aware of their provisions. In response to a questionnaire, almost a quarter of parents indicated that they did not understand the school's procedures. The school has taken appropriate steps to rectify this situation.

The complaints procedure meets most but not all the requirements for registration. It does not make provision for one person on a complaints panel to be independent of the school's management or explain the arrangements for recording the outcome of complaints.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

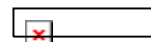
No.

What does the school need to do to comply with the regulations?

In order to comply with the Independent Schools Standards Regulations 2003 the school should:

- make provision for one member of the complaints panel to be independent of the school's management (paragraph 7(g)); and
- explain the arrangements for recording the outcomes of complaints to show at which stage they were resolved (paragraph 7(j)).

School details



| | | | |
|--|--|-----------|----------|
| Name of school: | St Nicholas School | | |
| DfES ref number: | 304/6059 | | |
| Type of school: | Preparatory | | |
| Status: | Independent | | |
| Age range of pupils: | 2 to 11 years | | |
| Gender of pupils: | Mixed | | |
| Number on roll (full-time pupils): | Boys 38, | Girls 27, | Total 65 |
| Number on roll (part-time pupils): | Boys 1, | Girls 8, | Total 9 |
| Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need: | Boys 0, | Girls 0, | Total 0 |
| Annual fees (day pupils): | £4,515 | | |
| Address of school: | 22 Salmon Street Kingsbury London NW9 8PN | | |
| E-mail address: | stnich@happychild.co.uk | | |
| Telephone number: | 020 8205 7153 | | |
| Fax number: | 020 8205 9744 | | |
| Headteacher: | Mrs Alyce Gregory | | |
| Proprietor: | Happy Child Ltd | | |
| Lead Inspector: | Mr John Evans | | |
| Dates of inspection: | 15 - 18 November 2004 | | |

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