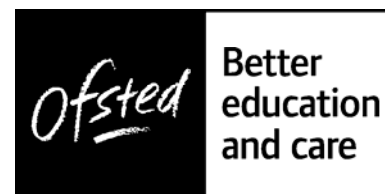


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27 June 2005

Mr C Weeks  
Interim Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Weeks

### **Implementation of St Nicholas School's Action Plan**

Following the visit of Ms T Herring HMI to your school on 7 and 8 June 2005, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings which are recorded in the attached note.

The visit was the third monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures. The focus of the inspection was to assess: the pupils' standards of attainment and their progress; the quality of education provided; the leadership and management of the school; the pupils' attitudes and behaviour; and the progress that has been made in implementing the action plan.

The school has made limited progress since the last monitoring inspection and limited progress overall since being subject to special measures.

I am copying this letter and the note of the inspection findings to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors and the Director of Education for Surrey. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Reid  
Head of Institutional Inspections and Frameworks Division

## **IMPLEMENTATION OF ST NICHOLAS SCHOOL'S ACTION PLAN**

### Findings of the third monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures

During the visit eleven parts of lessons and one registration session were inspected. Meetings were held with the headteacher and representatives from the LEA. Informal discussions were held with other members of staff and with pupils and samples of work were examined. A range of documents was scrutinised. Using this evidence, HMI made the following observations to the headteacher, the headteacher designate, the chair of the governing body, and a representative of the LEA. A copy of this correspondence will also be sent to the Commission for Social Care Inspectorate (CSCI) which continues to monitor the school in relation to serious shortcomings in aspects of safety and welfare. Residential provision was not inspected during this visit.

The pupils' success in art and design continued and their achievements in developing a vegetable garden were notable. Elsewhere standards remained below and well below expectations. Although more Year 11 pupils are expected to achieve Level 2 in basic skills examinations in English, standards in writing are extremely low. A high proportion of the pupils in Year 9, for example, are working at National Curriculum Level 1 in writing. This is the standard expected of five year olds and plans to improve standards of literacy across the curriculum are timely. Worryingly, fewer of the pupils than previously are expected to achieve higher level awards in science and mathematics.

The quality of teaching and learning in lessons had improved slightly and more good teaching was seen than previously. However, the proportion of unsatisfactory teaching was too high and the gulf between sound and unsatisfactory teaching had widened. Teaching was good in three lessons, satisfactory in one lesson and unsatisfactory in three. Some sessions of the alternative curriculum were also inspected; one was very good, one was good and one was unsatisfactory. The same groups of pupils were observed in a range of lessons taught by different staff and the strongest determinant of their success was the quality of teaching, including the management of their behaviour.

Good and better lessons were seen in English, art, mathematics and gardening. These lessons were well planned, practical and relevant. Time was used effectively and the learning and social needs of individual pupils were met appropriately. The teaching built on their previous learning. Key vocabulary and teaching points were clearly explained. Visual resources and information and communication technology were used to enhance learning. Teaching strategies were well structured and the staff focussed on learning so the pupils kept on task, overcame difficulties and

made progress. Expectations of work, effort and behaviour were made explicit and reinforced when boundaries were crossed. Warnings were given as necessary and the behaviour policy was implemented.

In the best lessons the pupils responded to the teacher's high expectations and trust. They showed initiative, collaborated and helped each other to make good decisions. They proceeded carefully and were concerned about the quality of their work. In contrast, in the unsatisfactory lessons planning was weak, too little time was spent teaching or learning and, as previously, explanations and questioning were unhelpful and relationships were poor. As a result the pupils did not care about the quality of their work, were rude to the staff and took every opportunity to prevent them from teaching.

Some aspects of teaching had improved but there is much more to be done. The match between the pupils' tasks and their needs was better overall but it is unacceptable that some lesson plans still took little account of individual needs. The system for supporting staff with planning and resources had improved but teaching which was previously unsatisfactory remained so. Computers were well used on one occasion to support learning but they were also inappropriately used for playing games in lessons. It is of concern that the pupils frequently assumed that they would be allowed to use them for this purpose.

Although assessment and recording had improved, there was no whole-school system for tracking achievement or rigorous analysis of performance and there is no intention to carry out end-of-year National Curriculum assessments for the pupils in Years 7, 8 and 10. However, some good assessment in literacy is to be used to improve targets on the pupils' individual education plans. These are better overall and incorporate an appropriate range of targets but they have little impact on planning and teaching. Marking celebrates the pupils' efforts and achievement but important errors were not corrected and there was little attempt to move the pupils forward in relation to learning objectives. The overuse of worksheets hindered the development of good presentation skills and independent writing.

Overall, the teaching assistants were highly effective. In particular, the quality of teaching in individualised reading sessions was good. However, the pupils receive too little tuition in reading and plans to provide individual support for mathematics, via a computer programme, have been further delayed. The temporary arrangement for unqualified staff to teach design and technology had continued and it is unsatisfactory that this high risk strategy had not been monitored.

Although corridors had been painted to repair damage caused by pupils the overall quality of accommodation remained unsatisfactory. Some classroom displays supported independent work in mathematics but support for independent writing

was less evident. The outdoor art display and vegetable garden enhanced the site and these examples of good work had not been damaged. The multi-use games area is a fine resource but it was not well used. The large site continues to pose significant management challenges and supervision was inadequate.

The behaviour of a few individuals had improved considerably since the previous visit but standards of behaviour were unsatisfactory overall and the pupils were louder and ruder than previously. Unacceptable behaviour ranged from ignoring staff to a physical assault on a member of staff. In lessons, when the teaching was good, most of the pupils' behaviour was acceptable. Those staff that taught well had authority both inside and outside of the classrooms and the pupils' response to instruction often appeared to depend more on relationships than a regard for rules or routines. However the pupils' behaviour in lessons was also acceptable when nothing or very little was expected of them and some of the weaker teachers succumbed to this manipulation.

The management of behaviour was inconsistent and a promising new reward system had not been properly implemented so its initial positive impact was negated. Because some of the staff did not follow the behaviour policy they were overly dependant on the 'on call' system. Although the school now records all serious incidents, the data had not been analysed and other important aspects of behaviour were not monitored.

The rate of exclusion increased significantly during the short spring term and was exceptionally high at 289 days. The current rate is lower at 57 days; however, most of the pupils in Year 11 have been granted study leave and are absent. This is unsatisfactory as the pupils have few examinations and no arrangements have been made for work placements. Nonetheless, the school has ensured that the pupils attend their examinations and join a special ceremony to mark the end of their secondary education.

The rate of attendance is unsatisfactory and falling. It was 86.2 per cent in the autumn term and is currently only 74.6 per cent. Unauthorised absences are also extremely high at 21.1 per cent. More than 25 per cent of the school was absent on the first day of inspection and this figure excluded the pupils on study leave. The high levels of additional staffing were not used effectively to improve attendance and although teaching assistants were helpful in trying to ensure that the pupils on site attended lessons, attendance in classes was even lower than the number on the register. An attempt to ensure that a pupil who did not attend class completed the work he was missing was highly appropriate.

The acting headteacher's contract finishes at the end of the summer term. His commitment, understanding and hard work have been unstinting but he has been

unable to significantly improve provision. The acting deputy headteacher has provided good support for behaviour but he has had less involvement in other areas of leadership. Indeed, responding to crises has dominated the work of both school leaders and they have not managed to motivate or galvanise the whole staff team. Consequently, new systems have not been supported. It is of concern that the school has been unable to make good use of the services offered from the Tavistock Centre or the additional administrative assistant. Nonetheless, the new alternative curriculum has had some success and the co-ordination of English, mathematics, special educational needs are improving.

Governance was satisfactory overall. An unsatisfactory financial audit required significant improvement to the monitoring of finances and the minutes of meetings indicate that this has already begun. Records of meetings also demonstrated the governors' good intentions to hold the school to account.

The consultant headteacher has provided good support to the acting headteacher. However the impact of this work and much of the LEA's support has been limited and additional support for senior management has not been as substantial as envisaged. More positively, the impact of support on some aspects of middle management and on governance has been satisfactory. The LEA has secured the services of the headteacher designate for two days per week and it is determined to ensure his successful induction. The headteacher designate intends to revise the school's action plan. This is appropriate and the LEA's support plan should compliment the revision.

### **Action taken to address the key issues**

#### **Key Issue 1: improve pupils' attitudes and behaviour, raising the expectations set for pupils' achievement**

This issue is addressed in detail above. Progress is limited.

#### **Key Issue 2: improve the overall quality of teaching and learning and raise the expectations set for pupils' achievement**

This issue is addressed in detail above. Progress is reasonable.

#### **Key Issue 3: raise pupils' achievement in science**

The scheme of work has not been finalised. Expectations regarding knowledge, skills and understanding are not agreed. Co-ordination is unsatisfactory. Progress is limited.

**Key Issues 4: improve the curriculum for the teaching of pupils in history and geography and to raise pupils' achievement**

This issue was not inspected.

**Key Issue 5: improve the curriculum and teaching of information communication and technology (ICT)**

Progress is limited, partially as a result of staff absence.

**Key Issue 6: improve procedures for finding out how well the school is doing and using the information to improve pupils' achievements and behaviour**

The school was required to prioritise actions to monitor and improve the safety and welfare of the pupils and this has begun to improve but progress is limited.

**Key Issue 7: ensure that governors play an active part in the life of the school and that they receive good information so that they can contribute to the improvement of the school**

This issue is discussed above. Progress is reasonable.