



St Nicholas School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 125457
LEA Surrey LEA
Inspection number 285238
Inspection dates 24 May 2006 to 25 May 2006
Reporting inspector Tina Herring

This inspection was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Special	School address	Taynton Drive
School category	Community special		Merstham
Age range of pupils	11 to 16		Redhill RH1 3PU
Gender of pupils	Boys	Telephone number	01737 215488
Number on roll	37	Fax number	01737 646173
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mr Roger Denton
Date of previous inspection	26 January 2004	Headteacher	Mr Craig Anderson

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by Tina Herring HMI working in collaboration with inspectors from the Commission for Social Care Inspectorate (CSCI).

Description of the school

St Nicholas is a day and residential school for pupils, aged between 11 and 16, who have severe emotional and behavioural difficulties. Many pupils also have moderate learning difficulties. Of the 37 pupils on roll 21 are resident for 4 days per week. The pupils come from mainly disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds. The number of families who are eligible to claim for free school meals is well above the national average. Pupils come mainly from Surrey schools.

Pupils attend the school after experiencing considerable disruption to their formal education. Most have spent significant periods of time out of school and many have been excluded from at least one school prior to admission to St Nicholas. Most pupils enter the school with attainment which is well below expectation in English, mathematics and science. Pupils are admitted throughout the school year and boarding provision is allocated in relation to need. All pupils attending the school have statements of special educational need and, with the exception of one, are of white British heritage. Two pupils are from Traveller backgrounds and three are looked after. The school does not provide an outreach service but has plans to extend provision in the future.

St Nicholas has undergone a period of considerable turmoil for a long time. It was formally recognised as a cause for concern in 2002 and placed in Special Measures in September 2004. Difficulties with leadership, recruitment and staff absence impeded development and prior to the appointment of the substantive headteacher the quality of education and the safety of pupils were inadequate.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

St Nicholas is a rapidly improving school with a very positive ethos. The school has truly begun to achieve its mission to 'engage, enlighten and inspire'. This notable transformation has been achieved in just 8 months. In accordance with section 13 (4) of the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures.

The school provides satisfactory value for money. The standard of education is satisfactory overall with several good and some outstanding aspects. There is very good capacity for further development because leadership by the headteacher is outstanding and because the school and care staff work very effectively together. The pupils benefit from good care, guidance and support and as a result, while they are in school, their behaviour and attitudes to learning are good compared to their peers and very good in comparison to their starting points.

The school is a safe, orderly and positive working environment and this has a good impact on learning. Pupils' progress in lessons has improved and is now satisfactory overall. However because of previous weaknesses in provision progress over time is too slow. Teaching has also improved. Many lessons are good but a lack of understanding about the mathematics curriculum leads to weak planning and pupils could make more progress in lessons. There is some good provision to improve basic skills, but not enough, and some of the least able pupils make insufficient progress. The curriculum is richer and more relevant than previously however requirements for teaching music and a modern foreign language are not met.

Behaviour is comprehensively monitored but the collation and analyse of information needs rationalising in order to reduce the burden of work. Senior staff are beginning to systematically monitor teaching and learning but recognise the need to strengthen this aspect of their leadership. The school knows what it needs to do to improve and evaluations by senior staff are broadly in line with those of external inspectors.

Effectiveness and efficiency of boarding provision

Grade: 3

CSCI led the inspection of boarding provision and concluded that the school has made significant improvements in ensuring pupils' safety, health, care and welfare. Provision was judged adequate with good capacity for further improvement. The report is due for publication in July 2006 and will include a number of minor recommendations for improvement.

What the school should do to improve further

Increase academic achievement: * Improve curriculum knowledge and planning in mathematics so that pupils make more progress in lessons * Develop systems for monitoring and quality assurance procedures which are efficient and effective in

evaluating learning and behaviour* Improve curriculum provision for basic skills, music and a modern foreign language

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Academic standards are well below average because of the pupils' learning and behavioural difficulties. Improvements in behaviour have created better opportunities for them to learn and make progress. Although they have not reached challenging academic targets they now make satisfactory progress in most lessons. One pupil described this improvement very aptly when he commented, 'we are calmer and learn things now'.

Additional support for reading and spelling has had some good impact on attainment but some pupils with significant learning difficulties do not make sufficient progress in gaining basic skills. At present, some of the most able pupils also fail to reach their potential in examination but the situation is improving. Most of the pupils in Years 10 and 11 attend college. The vast majority gain accreditation at entry level examinations and some achieve success in examinations at entry level two and three. A minority of pupils gain GCSEs in science and art. The school is aware that the range of accreditation could be widened and is researching various options, including the Duke of Edinburgh award.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Behaviour in lessons and around the school is good. The pupils are polite, willing to engage in conversation and they mostly cooperate with staff. They are proud of their work. Attitudes to learning are changing rapidly and this is evident in the vastly improved rate of attendance. Most of the pupils in Years 7 to 10 have attendance rates above 90%.

Moral, social, cultural and spiritual development is satisfactory. Teaching in these areas is good. Assemblies, involvement with fund raising activities, access to literature and art, lessons on equality are helping to broaden horizons and engage the pupils. Previously, exclusions were extremely high and assaults on staff and pupils occurred far too frequently. Both have fallen markedly and the school is a safe environment. Pupils make good use of formal systems for reporting bullying and complaints. A system for suggesting how the school could improve is commendable as it ensures pupils develop a range of work place skills. For example they are asked to make enquires, meet contractors and interview individuals. Pupils are beginning to understand that rights come with communal responsibilities and damage and graffiti are greatly reduced.

Behaviour is good because of the school's consistent and positive approaches to managing behaviour. The high profile reward system is taken very seriously. Unfortunately, however, outside of school, some pupils continue to engage in unsafe

practices and anti-social and criminal activities which impact on their attendance and ability to learn in school.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. Many lessons are good and the pupils enjoy learning. The best lessons feature interesting and purposeful activities and there is often a real audience for finished work. For example, during the inspection, the oldest pupils were learning to coach football for the official opening of the school's new games area and cereal boxes designed in design and technology lessons were the product of survey work and were being sent to a nationally known company. However, the teaching of mathematics is weaker than at the last inspection. Recruitment issues mean that numeracy is taught by staff with insufficient knowledge of the curriculum and teaching methods. Consequently, planning does not take account of the pupils' starting points or the next stage of their mathematical development and time and resources are not made best use of in lessons.

Very low levels of literacy and numeracy hinder the pupils' ability to access the curriculum and to work on tasks independently. Additional one-to-one teaching sessions have seen some good improvement but overall there is not enough time spent on improving literacy and numeracy and basic skills are not routinely taught across the curriculum.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum is interesting and mostly suitable for the age range. Opportunities for work related learning are well received and there are timely plans to expand provision. The rich programme for outdoor education is motivating and highly valued. Provision for science, geography, history and design technology has improved and pupils make sound progress in these subjects. A good range of out of school activities are available to the pupils who board and the school is sensibly considering how to extend extra curricular opportunities for day pupils. The school swimming pool has been renovated and it is to open following training for staff and safety checks. The school is becoming more involved with the local community and a regeneration project will be used to extend the curriculum and the pupils' contribution to their community. A very successful residential trip involved a minority of pupils and there are good plans to extend these opportunities.

The curriculum also has some weaknesses. Firstly, it does not meet statutory requirements to teach music and a modern foreign language. Secondly, many pupils have significant emotional difficulties and some have speech and language needs but they have not received support from a mental health specialist or speech therapy. Both services are to resume shortly.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Care, guidance and support are particularly good in relation to the pupils' health, safety and social development. Pupils know the school's expectations and how and where to get support. They are encouraged to seek help. Opportunities are provided to talk about difficult events and to learn from them. Pupils said that the staff 'are great' and 'very helpful'. The support for individuals in crisis is exceptional. Pupils explain how staff meet with their parents and carers, loan them their personal equipment and spend time helping them. Teaching assistants provide effective additional support in lessons and act as good role models.

Guidance properly encourages the pupils to make informed and healthy decisions. For example, a lesson in personal and social development required them to consider the risks posed by internet chat lines and comment on how they might use this facility in the future.

Pupils are given very specific and useful targets which arise from the monitoring of their behaviour. They know what they are expected to improve and have strategies for achieving their goals. In assembly the whole school listens carefully when the staff both read out assessments of individual behaviour and give guidance on how to improve. However, targets are not set for academic work and the pupils cannot explain what they are seeking to improve in their reading, writing, mathematics and other subjects.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The school is effective because of the exceptional leadership of the headteacher. He has driven improvement with a clear sense of purpose and a real understanding of what was required. He has formed an effective leadership team which works together well. Good improvements have been made to the school's premises and facilities. Teachers, care and support staff, and the pupils share a pride in their school and a genuine commitment to further improvement.

Many staff have grown in confidence and expertise. This is because of the leadership's clarity of expectation, secure systems for managing behaviour and access to good training. Governance has improved. The governors have started to provide useful challenge and support for the headteacher and it is appropriate that they plan to undertake monitoring visits during the school day. The school benefits from its partnership with the local authority and it is sensibly developing partnerships with other schools and organisations.

School self-evaluation is sound and appropriate areas have been identified for further development. An improvement plan clearly sets out how these might be achieved but it does not express measures of success sufficiently well in relation to the outcomes for the pupils. Senior staff have had very little opportunity to monitor teaching and

learning. This is necessary if the pupils are to achieve as well academically as they have done with their behaviour and attitudes.

In the light of the headteacher's track record, the growing capacity of the senior leadership team and the good behaviour of the pupils, the school has very good capacity to improve.

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Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	3	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	NA
The quality and standards in foundation stage	NA	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3	NA
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	NA
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	NA

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3	NA
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4	NA
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3	NA
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3	NA

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2	NA
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3	NA
The behaviour of learners	2	NA
The attendance of learners	2	NA
How well learners enjoy their education	2	NA
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	3	NA
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3	NA
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	3	NA
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	NA

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3	NA
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3	NA
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	NA

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	NA
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	NA
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	2	NA
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3	NA
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	3	NA
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3	NA
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	NA

The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy	
Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily	Yes
Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise	Yes
Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse	Yes
Learners are educated about sexual health	Yes
The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe	
Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements	Yes
Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place	Yes
Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism	Yes
Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them	Yes
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution	
Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships	Yes
Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them	Yes
Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community	Yes
The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being	
There is provision to promote learners' basic skills	Yes
Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams	Yes
Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in key stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form	Yes
Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy	Yes

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Pupils

I inspected your school recently to find out about the quality of education and care at St Nicholas. I appreciated the help that you and everybody gave me.

I am delighted to tell you that I think that your school has improved enormously and that your behaviour and attitudes to learning are much, much better and outshine many pupils in mainstream schools. This meant that when I saw you in lessons you learned more than you used to. I was impressed by your good manners and your support for the staff. I know that they give you good care, guidance and support and that you appreciate them. The curriculum and the quality of teaching have also improved and it is great that so many of you are taking exams, going to college and taking part in outdoor pursuits. Good improvements to the school's premises and facilities are also helping you to learn.

I have asked the school to think about how you could get better at reading, writing and mathematics and how you could be taught music and a foreign language. I am pleased that you have started to get homework and I know that studying outside of school hours, will help you to learn. Very best wishes for the future.

Yours sincerely

Tina Herring

H M Inspector