

# St Nicholas School

## Inspection report

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|--------------------------------|--------------------|
| <b>Unique Reference Number</b> | 115444             |
| <b>Local Authority</b>         | SOUTHEND-ON-SEA LA |
| <b>Inspection number</b>       | 311936             |
| <b>Inspection dates</b>        | 6–7 November 2007  |
| <b>Reporting inspector</b>     | Susan Lewis        |

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

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|---|---|
| <b>Type of school</b>                     | Special                                       |
| <b>School category</b>                    | Community                                     |
| <b>Age range of pupils</b>                | 10–16   |
| <b>Gender of pupils</b>                   | Mixed   |
| <b>Number on roll</b>                     |   |
| School                                    | 89  |
| <b>Appropriate authority</b>              | The governing body                            |
| <b>Chair</b>                              | Mr Barry Levitt                               |
| <b>Headteacher</b>                        | Mrs Gillian Houghton                          |
| <b>Date of previous school inspection</b> | 13 June 2005                                  |
| <b>School address</b>                     | Philpott Avenue<br>Southend-on-sea<br>SS2 4RL |
| <b>Telephone number</b>                   | 01702462322                                   |
| <b>Fax number</b>                         | 01702600487                                   |

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|--------------------------|-------------------|
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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

## Description of the school

St. Nicholas was originally an all age special school for pupils with moderate learning difficulties. It was re-designated in September 2005 to cater for pupils aged 11 to 16 with a wide range of learning difficulties. Currently, the pupils are aged 10 to 16. Seven pupils are in Year 6. Over half have moderate learning difficulties and about a quarter have behavioural, emotional and social difficulties (BESD), some of which are extremely challenging. Others have speech, language and communication difficulties or autism. Almost all pupils are from White British backgrounds, very few are from other ethnic groups. There are almost twice as many boys as girls. Six pupils are in the care of the local authority. When they enter the school, pupils' skills and achievements are well below those of other pupils of their age. This is because of their learning difficulties. The school has a number of awards, including Investors in People, Active Sports and Healthy Schools Awards and is part of an Excellence Cluster. At the time of the inspection a number of rooms were unavailable to pupils and staff because of extensive building work.

## 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 satisfactory school, which provides satisfactory value for money. There are however, many good features to its provision. Everyone is working hard to minimise the disruption caused by the building work although at times, its impact interferes with pupils' learning. As a result therefore, the accommodation is currently unsatisfactory for the pupils at St Nicholas.

Staff have tried to adjust to the different needs of the new and complex range of pupils in school but resources, which are not yet fit for purpose, inhibits progress. Occasionally, the challenging behaviour of a few pupils disrupts the learning of others. In addition, some subjects such as physical education cannot be taught fully. In others, teachers are restricted in their teaching methods because of the size and type of rooms currently available.

The leadership and management of the school are satisfactory. The leadership team and staff have a clear vision of what they want to do and are determined to ensure pupils have the best education they can in the circumstances. The team, together with the impressive governing body, work tirelessly and are managing the school well through these difficult times. They have a good capacity for developing the school further. The leadership team has been strengthened by the development of a senior advisory team, which is now ready to extend its work further.

A lot of the leadership team's time and energy has been diverted into overseeing the building work with its ensuing safety issues for pupils, whilst developing systems to manage pupils with the most challenging behaviour. To some extent, the building work has slowed whole school improvement. There has been satisfactory improvement with the issues raised in the last inspection. The curriculum is now good. The consistency of planning and teaching has improved considerably, as have the ways in which the school gathers data on pupils and assesses their learning. However, although the school is beginning to analyse this data, it does not yet do so for all the different groups of pupils it has, and this affects how well it can set challenging school targets. It now monitors individual pupils' progress well in core subjects but still has some work to do in other subjects, and on how all teachers use this information to plan their lessons. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Because of their learning difficulties, pupils continue to attain standards considerably below pupils of a similar age. Relative to their starting points, their achievements are satisfactory. Pupils achieve well in basic literacy and numeracy skills, speaking and listening, science and in life skills, and they do particularly well in art. However, because of their behaviour, a few pupils spend too much time out of classrooms to make sufficient progress.

Strong personal support for pupils and their families ensures that most pupils make good strides in their personal development and in developing positive attitudes. Attendance and all aspects of the care and concern for pupils are good. Staff are constantly encouraging and supportive. Notwithstanding some individuals, behaviour of the majority of pupils is satisfactory overall. Pupils and a few parents however, are concerned about some pupils' behaviour but agree that staff try very hard to manage it effectively.

Excellent partnerships with other schools and colleges, as well as work in lessons, allow a good range of more practical, vocational courses to be available to pupils. These develop pupils' work-related skills exceptionally well, strongly motivating them to build up and apply key skills such as writing and numeracy in meaningful ways. Close working with the Entry to Employment (e2e) Centre on site and with local businesses means that a particular strength of the school

is the way in which it helps pupils make the transition into further education and the world of work through work experience and other opportunities. Pupils mature through these placements and experiences. As one parent said, such experiences allow pupils 'to have a vision of what the future could hold for them.'

### **What the school should do to improve further**

- Work with the local authority to ensure a swift resolution to the accommodation issues.
- Ensure teachers use all available information about pupils' needs and learning to guide their work, increase their expectations and manage the most challenging behaviour in a consistent and effective way.
- Use pupil data more effectively to set more challenging targets

## **Achievement and standards**

### **Grade: 3**

Achievement and standards are satisfactory. Many pupils achieve well across the school in key areas such as their reading and number skills. They make good progress in relation to personal, social, health and citizenship education (PSHCE) and in developing their speaking and listening skills. This is due to the strong and targeted support through reading recovery, social use of language programmes and the good focus on self-expression in lessons. However, a few poorly behaved pupils make more limited progress because they have to be removed from lessons. Until recently the level of exclusions has been high. Pupils achieve particularly well in art, where they regularly gain GCSE passes at grades C or D and achieve well overall in PSHCE and in science. The school is responsive to individual pupils' talents and uses local schools and colleges very well to give pupils opportunities to extend their achievements and interests, such as in agriculture, technology, mathematics and sports. Pupils regularly complete vocational awards in an agricultural course. Through encouraging individual talents purposefully in subjects such as art or gardening, individual pupils' achievements have been exceptional. Pupils also achieve well through work related and enterprise experiences. Testimonies from partner agencies and from pupils themselves confirm the high quality of this aspect of the school's work. One pupil for example is about to embark on a modern apprenticeship.

## **Personal development and well-being**

### **Grade: 2**

The personal development and well-being of pupils is good. The school values and respects every individual even when they are displaying challenging behaviour. Because teachers are such good role models and because pupils are encouraged to recognise and use any talent they have, pupils make real strides in developing their confidence and how they view themselves and others. Most treat each other with respect. They make good progress in developing their personal skills, particularly in applying their practical, literacy and numeracy skills through community and work related programmes, such as the e2e programme. This means they are very well prepared either for the next stage of their education, or ready to start work. Pupils demonstrate a good understanding of how to lead healthy lifestyles, supported well by the various school clubs and sports partnerships. They show good understanding of how to stay safe, whether in relation to personal safety or in developing safe practices in lessons, such as art and science. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is also good.

Parents say their children like coming to St Nicholas School, some changing from being reluctant attenders to looking forward to school re-starting after the holidays. Some feel their children

have 'totally changed'. They are more able to manage their own behaviour and feelings and have more 'belief' in themselves. Attendance is good. Behaviour is now satisfactory overall. Although exclusions have been high, they have reduced considerably since the last inspection. Individual pupils however, need more support to improve their behaviour. Pupils are keen to fulfil their role on the School Council and want to 'make a difference'. Their contribution to the school community is good.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

#### **Grade: 3**

Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Whilst there are some good features in the teaching, too much time is lost in lessons dealing with the challenging behaviour of a few pupils. This affects the continuity of the lesson and other pupils' learning. Due to the restricted accommodation, there are insufficient withdrawal rooms to support these pupils who require time out and individual support.

Teachers usually think carefully about how to motivate their pupils. Most plan challenging but relevant work for individuals, according to their needs. However, this is not the case in all lessons and at times, some pupils say 'we could do harder work'. On the other hand, some feel that the work is too hard for them to do by themselves. Some of this discrepancy is because, although the school has made improvements in the way it assesses pupils' progress, particularly in English, mathematics and science, not all teachers take this information into account in their individual lesson planning. Nonetheless, there is sometimes excellent use of resources, such as with the interactive whiteboard or role-play, as in the Year 6 English lesson about a 'Pirate's Day'. A science lesson for older 'Life Skills' pupils similarly had an excellent session where pupils were challenged to identify one thing they had learned and they did so with pride.

### **Curriculum and other activities**

#### **Grade: 2**

Although the accommodation continues to have a negative impact on which aspects of the curriculum can be taught, such as physical education, the school has improved the curriculum well since the last inspection. A good range of award bearing courses are now offered, for example modern foreign languages in Year 6 as well as in Key Stage 3. A good range of clubs and visits enriches the curriculum further, although the clubs have ceased temporarily due to the current lack of space. Excellent partnerships with local specialist colleges and other schools enhance the learning opportunities for pupils in the visual arts, dance, sports and business and enterprise. These additional opportunities allow individual pupils with particular talents to have inclusive and challenging opportunities. Community links with local supermarkets and banks allow pupils to gain real life experiences in relation to managing money and food technology preparation. The Key Stage 4 curriculum is particularly strong, extending pupils' understanding of the world of work very well indeed, allowing them to experience college courses, and complete relevant vocational and academic qualifications. The Connexions service provides a good service in supporting pupils when they are preparing to leave school.

## Care, guidance and support

### Grade: 2

The care, guidance and support provided for pupils is good. Strong working relationships established with parents and with all agencies actively support pupils. For example, when the school had to close due to the building work, parents were grateful that homework was still set, even delivered to pupils' homes by teachers, who retained contact, maintaining their support for pupils and their families. Safeguarding procedures are good, health and safety procedures and risk assessment are meticulously implemented to ensure pupils feel safe.

The school's academic tracking procedures are satisfactory but not consistent across all subjects. Staff work hard to help pupils understand what they must learn next and involve them in setting their targets. The school currently has no access to speech and language therapy and very limited access to specialist support for pupils with the most challenging behaviour. As a result, the programmes in place for these pupils do not always lead to consistent behaviour management.

## Leadership and management

### Grade: 3

Leadership and management is satisfactory overall with some good features. These include the clear leadership vision, direction and capacity. The reduction in fixed term exclusions is a good example of how the school is now getting more to grips with pupils' needs.

Partnership with other agencies are outstanding and highly effective. Involvement with other schools and community partners, supports pupils' and their inclusion in the community exceptionally well, and secures additional resources, enriching pupils' experiences.

Governors are very supportive of the school's work and fulfil their duties well, constantly acting as advocates for the school and joining in its training sessions. They know the school's strengths well, what it needs to do to improve, and check that it is happening.

Self-evaluation strategies are however, satisfactory. The school leadership knows what it needs to do and is frustrated that current disruptions slow development down. There are some good examples of how the school analyses data, for example in core subjects according to gender, for looked-after children and for different year groups. However, the school does not yet analyse the data according to the differing learning needs of groups of pupils. This currently limits its ability to set whole school challenging targets and raise standards and achievements further.

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## Annex A

## Inspection judgements

|   |                |
|---|----------------|
| Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate | School Overall |
|---|----------------|

### 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   |
| Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection  | Yes |
| How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?   | 1   |
| The capacity to make any necessary improvements   | 2   |

### Achievement and standards

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

### Personal development and well-being

|   |   |
|---|---|
| How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?                                  | 2 |
| The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development                                     | 2 |
| The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles   | 2 |
| The extent to which learners adopt safe practices   | 2 |
| How well learners enjoy their education   | 2 |
| The attendance of learners  | 2 |
| The behaviour of learners   | 3 |
| The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community                                    | 2 |
| How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being | 1 |

### The quality of provision

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

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

## Annex A

**Leadership and management**

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| <b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>                                       | 3   |
| How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education | 2   |
| How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards  | 3   |
| The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation  | 3   |
| How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can                     | 3   |
| How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money  | 3   |
| The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities  | 2   |
| Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?  | Yes |
| Does this school require special measures?   | No  |
| Does this school require a notice to improve?  | No  |

## Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

8 November 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Nicholas School, Southend-on-Sea, SS2 4RL

Thank you for being so welcoming when we visited your school last week. We are grateful that so many of you were happy to talk with us and let us look at your work. Your school is helping you to learn satisfactorily and has a lot of good features. You told us that you liked the school and your teachers and feel it is helping you to make progress, though a few of you feel, and we agree, that you could do harder work. You could make even more progress if you had work that challenged your own ability. The school is doing a good job at helping you to grow up and improve your behaviour. Like you, we feel that a few pupils' behaviour stops you learning at times. You also said you found the building work and all the changes at the school difficult; you wanted to know when it would end. We think that Mrs Houghton, the governors and all the staff have worked hard to deal with all of this but it has interfered with your enjoyment of school and what you can learn in some subjects at the moment.

We have asked Mrs Houghton and the governors to make sure the building work is completed as quickly as possible so that you can have all the rooms you should have. We know that you will enjoy learning even more once your new school buildings are complete. We have also asked them and the teachers to look at how they plan the work that you do so that it is linked as closely as possible to what you need to learn now. This will help them deal with some of the poor behaviour that upsets or worries you. This will help each of you to be even clearer about how you are expected to behave and what you are going to learn. The teachers also need to look at how they use the records they keep about your progress to check on how the different groups of pupils learn in your school, so that they can improve the school further and make sure everyone achieves the best they can.

Best wishes

Sue Lewis

Lead inspector