

St Nicholas Priory Middle School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	121093
Local Authority	Norfolk
Inspection number	313872
Inspection dates	30 June –1 July 2008
Reporting inspector	Roderick Passant

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

Type of school	Middle deemed primary
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	8–12
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	375
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr James Wright
Headteacher	Mr Mark Adams
Date of previous school inspection	12 January 2004
School address	St Nicholas Road Great Yarmouth Norfolk NR30 1NL
Telephone number	01493 843552
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Age group	8-12
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is a Church of England Voluntary Controlled school and a Christian ethos forms a basis of the school aims. It serves a wide area and is larger than most primary schools. While the majority of pupils are of White British heritage or from other white backgrounds, a small proportion of pupils come from a range of other cultural heritages. The percentage of pupils with English as an additional language is higher than most schools and includes 18 pupils at an early stage of learning English. Over a third of pupils are eligible for free school meals, which is above average. A third of pupils require additional help with their learning, again above average. The number of pupils with statements detailing the support they require is more than double the national average. There are six pupils in the care of the local authority. The number of pupils joining or leaving the school at different times has increased significantly.

The school is currently a middle school, but it becomes a junior school (7 to 11 year olds) in September 2008.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

The school helps pupils develop well as young people. Year 7 pupils are particularly proud of their school and are good ambassadors for it. Over their time in school, they have achieved well academically when judged against their starting points. Progress is good overall. It accelerates in the upper part of the school and is particularly rapid in Year 7. School data shows that standards by the end of Year 7 are close to expected levels in reading and mathematics but below in writing. Pupils work at an appropriate level in science. Higher attaining pupils do well, particularly in mathematics. Pupils requiring additional help with their learning make good progress against their targets. Year 7 pupils display good attitudes to learning. They settle to work quickly and concentrate. In one lesson, they demonstrated their will to achieve by sticking with a problem even though it was not superficially exciting. Pupils recognise how much the school has helped them develop self-belief. With the sound academic standards and good social skills they are developing, they are looking forward to moving to their new high school with confidence.

Personal development is good. Pupils relate well to each other, they feel safe in school and their behaviour is good. Pupils know what it means to be healthy and the many opportunities for physical activity support this well. Very positive relationships exist between pupils and adults. This, plus skilled, effective teaching and a curriculum which engages and interests pupils, foster good academic and personal achievement. Teachers and teaching assistants work particularly well together to structure good learning. On occasions, the tasks set for pupils are not challenging enough, which limits their achievement. However, the way the school has linked subjects together provides good opportunities to develop pupils' writing skills and stimulate their excitement and enjoyment of reading.

What makes the crucial difference in this school is the outstanding quality of the care and support the school provides for its pupils. A significant number of pupils face difficult or challenging personal circumstances. Settling to school work is very difficult for some who are worried or upset and making good progress is more difficult for those whose attendance is sporadic. The school has key workers, respected by pupils and parents, who work extremely effectively to ease pupils' concerns and establish routines.

The headteacher provides excellent leadership. He has worked doggedly over time to assemble the various pieces of the 'jigsaw' that have now slotted into place. He has created a very strong team of staff who share his commitment to all pupils. Leadership across the school at all levels is good. There is a relentless focus on improving the quality of learning and pupils' achievement through close monitoring. The school has prepared well for its new role as a junior school and has good capacity in its leadership to build further on its current good strengths.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that work planned for pupils is always challenging
- Exploit the opportunities in the reformed curriculum for pupils to write innovatively across all subjects and to encourage enjoyment and excitement in reading

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Results of the national tests at the end of Year 6 are broadly average but in 2007, they dipped. Nevertheless, these pupils made satisfactory progress from Year 2 overcoming some barriers to learning. For example, about a third of pupils had disrupted learning as they joined the school from Year 4 onwards and a large number of pupils were learning English as an additional language. School data, based on the latest assessments, indicates that the current Year 6 pupils are on track to meet their targets.

The school makes extensive use of test data to set demanding targets for year-on-year progress. Careful analysis of data led to changes to the support for pupils who need additional help in their learning. As a result, these pupils are now making good progress against their targets.

Many pupils start school with limited vocabulary and literacy skills. This hampers their academic progress, especially in writing. The recent changes to the school's curriculum provided valuable additional contexts for writing, encouragement of reading for pleasure and development of pupils' imagination.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils enjoy school because much of what they do is fun. They feel safe and secure in school and are confident to approach an adult if troubled. They feel adults listen to them and take their concerns seriously. Behaviour is good and pupils generally get on well with each other. Pupils understand what makes a healthy life-style because the school promotes this very effectively. They make a sound contribution to the school community through school council and school responsibilities. The school works extremely hard, and successfully, to promote their personal confidence and self-esteem by making them feel special. Pupils take advantage of the many good opportunities to work in teams. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good and the structure of 'rewards' and 'consequences' establishes a clear understanding of right and wrong. Cultural development is satisfactory and pupils respect others peoples' values and beliefs. Pupils develop satisfactory skills to cope with the next steps in their education. Attendance is satisfactory.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

There is in the school, a tireless focus by the school's leadership on improving teachers' skills and in creating the conditions for good learning. Teachers are held strongly to account for the progress of their classes but also receive good support through teamwork, a mentor or 'buddy', and training. Planning is detailed and thorough. Pupils are very clear what the lesson is about and what they have to do to succeed. Lessons are usually pacy and engage pupils. While pupils apply themselves well, the level of work could be more demanding on occasions. There are consistent, unobtrusive but highly effective systems in place across the school for managing behaviour. All adults involved in classrooms model good relationships. Teaching assistants are skilled and work well to promote effective learning in class as well as during the additional support activities they provide. Marking is detailed and it tells pupils how to improve their work.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The school has made major changes to the curriculum over the year. It is now linking subjects more closely together as topics. This has unlocked teachers' creativity and added new zest to their work. Pupils are more interested and engaged in their learning. However, there are too few opportunities for creative work such as art or drama. The topics provide opportunities, which have not yet been fully exploited, to encourage enjoyment and excitement of reading and for innovative writing for a particular audience and purpose. Lessons give good opportunities to develop speaking and listening skills so that pupils can rehearse or try out their ideas. A recent focus in the school on developing phonics work is helping pupils' spelling. All of these provide opportunities to enhance further classrooms as places rich in language. The provision for basic skills is good, as is the information and communication technology work. Pupils enjoy the many opportunities for physical education and sports including the after-school clubs on offer. The school makes good use of trips, including residential experiences, and visitors to enrich the curriculum further.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The school is extremely caring and supportive of its pupils. It has put in place an outstanding network of support. Members of staff keep a very close eye on all pupils. There are extremely thorough procedures in place for the safeguarding and safety of pupils. Key workers have the respect of parents and pupils. They work with vulnerable pupils and families and use the very strong links with outside agencies to prevent problems growing into a crisis. These workers have a key role in the school in sustaining pupils' confidence in the adult world.

The school tracks and analyses the academic progress of all pupils extremely well. Teachers quickly identify pupils who are not making progress they should and there are very effective support programmes to help pupils catch up. Pupils learn to manage their behaviour well because the inclusion work develops their teamwork skills and helps them learn to manage their emotions. There is good provision for gifted and talented pupils outside of lessons and a strong team of staff managing the provision for those pupils who require additional help in their learning, including those for whom English as an additional language. There has been very carefully planned transfer to the high school, particularly for those pupils in local authority care.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

There is a sustained focus on raising pupils' achievement. Getting the school to its current position has not been easy, due to difficulties in the past in recruiting suitably experienced staff. Nevertheless, the school has helped its newly qualified and less experienced teachers grow into good teachers and they, importantly, have stayed at the school. There is now the bedrock of good teaching. This ensures consistent approaches, particularly in the management of pupils' behaviour. The result is a school that is stable, calm and has a very positive ethos. It is able now to focus on how it sets about maximising pupils' learning.

The headteacher has been innovative in establishing key roles in the school to support pupils. The school works extremely hard to minimise the barriers to learning that many pupils experience. Every pupil does matter in this school. There is very strong teamwork and strong mutual support amongst the adults. Management is effective and leadership across the school is good. Although some leaders are relatively new in post, they have taken up their responsibilities quickly and effectively. Delegation is effective. Governance is satisfactory and governors are committed and supportive. There is a core of experienced governors but others are still relatively new to the role. Many of the books in the library and across the school are outdated or worn out.

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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
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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?	2
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?	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2

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	3
The behaviour of learners	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	3
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2
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?	1

¹ 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

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2
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	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3
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

2 July 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Nicholas Priory Middle School, Great Yarmouth, NR30 1NL

I enjoyed my two days in your school very much. Thank you to all those Year 7 pupils who gave up some of their lunchtime to speak to us. What you had to say was very interesting and helpful. You are clearly proud of the school and are particularly good ambassadors for it. Clearly, the two days we were in school were special days for many of you because you visited your new schools. I was impressed by how confident you were.

This is a good school. It is helping you achieve well. Standards in reading and mathematics and science by the end of Year 7 are similar to those seen in other schools, although some of you still have some catching up to do in your writing skills. The school helps you develop well as young people. You told us you enjoy school because lots of what you do is fun and you talked about the help that you get. It was good to hear that you feel safe in school and that you all have someone you would go to talk to if you were upset about something. Teachers and adults in classrooms help you learn well. Teachers are linking subjects together well in topics and you are clearly finding this fun and interesting. There should now be more times in the topic when you can practise your writing skills. Sometimes, what the teacher asks you to do is a bit easy for you. I asked Mr Adams to work with the teachers to ensure that the work planned always makes you think and work hard. Another thing I asked him to do was to encourage you to read more just for fun.

The care and support the school provides for you all is excellent. All adults work very well as a team and care about you a great deal. You are part of that team. You behave well and get on with each other in lessons and around the school. The school is undergoing many changes and Mr Adams is determined it will get better and better. With your continued help, working hard and behaving in lessons, he and the staff will be able to make the improvements all the faster.

Sincere good wishes for your future school careers.

Roderick Passant

Lead inspector