

St Nicholas School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	125457
Local Authority	Surrey
Inspection number	315239
Inspection date	2 July 2008
Reporting inspector	Kay Charlton

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Boys
Number on roll	
School	47
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Frank Shore
Headteacher	Mr Craig Anderson
Date of previous school inspection	24 May 2006
School address	Taynton Drive Merstham Redhill RH1 3PU
Telephone number	01737 215488
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

St Nicholas is a day and residential special school. All pupils have a statement of special educational need associated with emotional, social and behavioural difficulties and the vast majority have associated learning difficulties. They come from a wide geographical area serving Surrey and neighbouring local authorities. Pupils are predominantly of white British origin and none speak English as an additional language. Of the current 47 pupils on roll, 12 are regular weekday boarders. The school has gained the Sportsmark award.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

St. Nicholas is a good school. There are outstanding features in the care, guidance and support pupils receive, and in aspects of their personal development. The school has continued to go from strength to strength since the last inspection when it was judged to be satisfactory. Parents and pupils are justifiably proud of the improvements that have taken place and, pupils in particular, speak about it in glowing terms.

At the heart of the school's vision is the belief that all pupils, whatever their background or ability, can be successful. The school has worked hard to ensure that this is achieved in practice. Teaching and learning are now good and, as a result, pupils achieve well. By the age of 16, standards are well below those in mainstream schools, but this represents good progress given pupils' very low attainment on entry. Staff work very well as a team and they use praise very effectively to improve pupils' self-esteem, concentration and behaviour. Teachers plan lessons conscientiously, and make good use of resources to make learning fun. Assessment is much improved since the last inspection and staff successfully help pupils to review their learning and ensure that they are clear about what they need to do to improve further. There are models of outstanding teaching, for example in humanities, but there are a small number of lessons where teaching is only satisfactory. In these situations, staff do not fully challenge the learning of pupils of different abilities and, consequently, pupils do not achieve as well as they might.

Pupils' personal development is a strong feature of the school's work. Behaviour is excellent and attendance is good with all pupils showing substantial improvement in these areas since they first joined the school. This success is based on well-established systems to promote and reward their every effort. Pupils thoroughly enjoy school and are keen to point out how it has helped them. They enjoy the calm and purposeful lessons and speak extremely positively about the extra activities, such as powerboat racing and climbing, that they undertake. They have a good, clear understanding about how to lead a healthy lifestyle and how to keep safe. There are few instances of bullying and pupils know what they should do if any occurs. The care they receive is of very high quality and pupils say that, 'We are very safe in this school'. They learn to trust others and are clear that, 'There is always someone who will listen if we have a problem'. They learn to respect times of quiet reflection, for example, when saying grace before lunch, and show that they respect others with different needs as well as those from different backgrounds and beliefs. The school's strong links with others provide a wide range of opportunities that enable pupils to make an excellent contribution to the community. A good example of this is the way that pupils help to organise the annual steam rally weekend.

Leadership is good overall. The headteacher gives an extremely strong lead and provides the commitment, enthusiasm and determination to ensure that the school continues to improve. With the strong support of his deputy and the senior team, he gives a clear sense of direction. He has established a climate of strong teamwork amongst all adults so that everyone realises they have a part to play. Governors are effective, they ensure that statutory requirements are met and that the school provides good value for money. The school's self-evaluation is robust, largely as a result of the extremely rigorous and discerning monitoring by the headteacher and deputy. The information gained from monitoring, particularly that about pupils' progress, is used very effectively. It ensures that those areas most in need of improvement are highlighted and that improvement takes place. As yet, this information is not used well enough to compare the effectiveness of the school with the national picture so that it can be certain that its

performance is as good as it should be. The school's track record of improvement shows that it is very well placed to improve in the future.

Effectiveness of boarding provision

Grade: 2

The Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) report, carried out in May 2008, judged the residential provision to be good some with outstanding features. All the national minimum standards were judged to be either met or exceeded. This very positive outcome is reflected in the present inspection. There are effective links between the day and residential provisions with a number of staff working across both. The school has already implemented parts of the action plan to address the issues raised in the CSCI report.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that, in all lessons, staff fully challenge the learning of all pupils.
- Make better use of its own monitoring information to check that it is doing as well as it should be in comparison with other schools.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

On entry pupils have experienced considerable disruption in their education and many have missed substantial amounts of schooling. The school sets challenging targets for every individual and, in a range of ways, makes it clear to pupils what they must do to improve. Pupils respond to this very clear guidance and quickly make real efforts to improve the standard of their work. By age 16, virtually all attain Entry Level GCSE grades in a range of subjects and, a few attain grades that are better than this. In the small proportion of lessons where teaching is satisfactory rather than good, pupils can still achieve more.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' personal development is good. The school has a significant effect on improving pupils' attitudes, behaviour and their attendance, which, in turn has had a very positive impact on pupils' achievements. Most have changed the pattern of their attendance for the better and a significant number have reached over 95% attendance during the last term. Pupils respect the school's behaviour policy and the consistency with which it is implemented, prompting a number of comments to the effect that it is 'firm but fair'. Pupils make an extremely strong contribution to life in school and the wider community. Their voice is heard and they play an active role in making decisions that affect everyone; for example about the ways in which the school grounds are developed. They show a good appreciation of potentially dangerous situations and speak very knowledgeably about the ways in which they should respond. Pupils' good development of basic skills, along with their much-improved personal skills, means that they are well prepared for their future economic well-being.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The quality of teaching has improved significantly as a consequence of the good support systems that have been put in place and the effectiveness of monitoring by senior staff. Teachers plan their lessons and assess pupils' progress very carefully. Very good relationships are a feature of all lessons and these are used effectively to engage pupils and actively involve them in their own learning. Behaviour and classroom management is very effective so that lessons are calm and purposeful. In lessons where there is excellent teaching, staff set a high expectation for each pupil, and very effectively challenge them to think things out for themselves. This practice, however, is not consistent across all lessons and there are times where pupils' achievements are not as good as they should be.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The school's good curriculum goes a long way to meeting pupils' needs with a very strong focus on personal development as well as on pupils' basic skills. There is a wide range of enrichment, particularly in outdoor education. All of these extras add to pupils' enjoyment. In order to respond to both changing demands nationally and to match pupils' aspirations for their future employment more closely the school is rightly reviewing and extending the vocational content of the curriculum.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The school has invested a great deal of time and effort in establishing systems to guide and support pupils' personal and academic development. Those to support pupils' personal development are extremely effective with care and education staff all playing an important and complimentary role. Comprehensive tracking of each pupil's progress is used very effectively to organise extra support for individuals if they experience difficulty. Child protection and risk assessment procedures are robust and safeguarding arrangements fully meet government requirements. Parents and carers are seen as partners in their child's education and the school works well with them and with a very wide range of outside agencies to support pupils' development.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher has established an ethos where everyone is continually striving to improve the provision so that pupils get a good 'second chance' to obtain qualifications relevant to their future. Very effective systems for staff development and training have enabled changes in teaching and learning to take place and, in turn, ensure that pupils' achievements have improved. Middle leaders have developed their areas well, for example in mathematics, and are increasingly taking on responsibilities for aspects of whole school monitoring. The governing body has also benefited from a significant amount of training and now act effectively as the school's critical friend. Everyone in school is very clear about the school's strengths and those

areas that need to be improved. Consequently, the school continues to have a focus on developing aspects of teaching and it is starting to make more effective use of its monitoring information, particularly to help governors check how well it is doing.

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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 effectiveness of boarding provision	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4
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	1
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2

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	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

11 July 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Nicholas School, Redhill, RH1 3PU

Thank you for all the help you gave me when I came to visit your school. I particularly enjoyed and valued the discussion I held with a small group of you. You told me that your school has improved greatly. I agree with you and could see that the school is going from strength to strength. Your school provides you with a good education.

I was glad to hear that you really enjoy school and was particularly impressed with your excellent behaviour and the ways in which you help others. Teaching is good, lessons are interesting and staff pay good attention to helping you to do your best. The way they look after you is excellent.

The headteacher and senior team have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They are keen to see it improve even further. I have asked them to work with the staff to make sure that, in all lessons, teachers fully challenge your learning so that each one of you achieves all that you can. Also, I have asked them to use the school's information, for example about the progress that you all make, to check that it is doing as well as other schools. By trying your hardest at all times you can help.

Yours sincerely,

Kay Charlton

Lead Inspector