

St Nicholas Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	123021
Local Authority	Oxfordshire
Inspection number	327832
Inspection dates	8–9 July 2009
Reporting inspector	Cathie Munt HMI

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

The registered childcare, managed by the governing body, was inspected under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	368
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS	0
Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years	0
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Richard Yates
Headteacher	Mrs Rachel Crouch
Date of previous school inspection	17 May 2006
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Raymund Road Old Marston Oxford OX3 0PJ
Telephone number	01865 242838
Fax number	01865 248029

Age group	3–11
Inspection dates	8–9 July 2009
Inspection number	327832

© Crown copyright 2009

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This larger than average primary school, located on an exceptionally spacious site within the city, takes pupils from the diverse surrounding area and beyond. Almost 40 per cent of the pupils are from minority ethnic groups, the largest group being of Pakistani heritage. About a quarter of the pupils are at the earlier stages of learning English. The proportion of pupils who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities is above the national average. Most of these pupils have moderate learning difficulties and a small number have dyslexia. The school has a higher proportion of pupils with statements of special educational needs than is generally found in primary schools. An Autism Resource Base (ARB) caters for up to 15 pupils with very complex needs. Currently, 11 pupils attend the base, many of whom join main school classes for part of the time. Early Years Foundation Stage provision comprises two Foundation classes, one for four-year-olds and one for five-year-olds. Extended provision before and after school is under the management of the governing body.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school. In a considerable number of areas, its work is outstanding. Inspectors agree with the very positive views expressed by numerous parents. Aspects specifically highlighted by parents included the headteacher's outstanding leadership, the quality of teaching, and the friendliness and approachability of staff. The school's extremely positive attitude to inclusion, the pupils' good behaviour and the excellent provision for pupils with moderate or extreme learning difficulties were also mentioned in many responses. A number of children who entered the school in Key Stage 2, sometimes following negative experiences elsewhere, were said to have experienced a change in attitude and made rapid progress in learning because of the excellent care and guidance they received. A great number of parents mentioned their children's sheer delight at attending school.

When children join the school, their attainment is wide ranging but, overall, it is well below average, particularly in communication and literacy skills. Each year, between a quarter and a third of new entrants to the school speak a language other than English. Children flourish in the Foundation classes. As one parent commented, 'Children of all abilities are encouraged to learn and enjoy their time at St. Nicks.' This includes children in the Autism Resource Base, who 'are made to feel very much part of the whole school'. A recent local authority review rightly confirmed the high quality of the unit's work.

In 2007 and 2008, pupils' attainment was below average at the end of both key stages. In response, the school developed more effective tracking of pupils' progress and increased the number of suitable programmes to tackle underachievement. Inspection confirms that pupils in all year groups are making good progress in their learning, sometimes from a low starting point. Consequently, and as predicted by the school, standards have risen this year. The unvalidated results for 2009 indicate that standards are likely to be at least in line with expectations at the end of both key stages. However, the school rightly considers that pupils could make still further gains, lifting standards to an even higher level.

An increasing proportion of teaching is of the highest calibre. Consistency in teaching has been achieved through well-targeted training, keen attention to detail in lesson planning and robust assessment practices. Effective monitoring and support from the senior leaders ensure that teaching and learning are effective. Teaching assistants work closely with class teachers and play an important part in the pupils' education. The highly regarded work of the Autism Resource Base is an example of the impact that high-quality teaching has on the life chances of the most vulnerable pupils.

The school actively nurtures pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and these aspects are an outstanding part of their personal development. Exceptionally effective care, guidance and support promote the safety and well-being of all, including vulnerable groups and looked-after children. Behaviour is good and pupils report that there is virtually no bullying. They are confident that, if anyone has any concerns, the staff will listen to them and help them to overcome any problems. Community cohesion is an outstanding feature and the range of effective local, national and global connections is evident from the myriad diplomas and certificates displayed throughout the school. Vibrant displays around the school reflect the richness of the expanding curriculum. It impacts positively on the pupils' learning by developing their knowledge, extending their understanding of their role in the world community and

providing good opportunities for writing. It is not surprising that pupils say they love coming to school.

Leadership and management of the school are good, with some outstanding aspects, in particular, the supportive and inclusive ethos of the school and the happy atmosphere noted by many parents. A huge number praised the efforts of all the staff and the headteacher was said to be 'a credit to her profession'. Teaching, learning and the curriculum are managed very well but a small number of routine management tasks, relating to office procedures and governors' reporting, are not completed in a timely manner. However, the wide range of highly successful actions that have been undertaken since the last inspection to bring about improvement demonstrates good capacity to improve further. The school looks to the future with confidence.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

Many children enter the Early Years Foundation Stage with attainment levels that are well below those usually found in their age group. Children settle in very quickly and are happy to be at school. The excellent leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage, together with the high-quality care, have resulted in all children making good progress across all areas of learning and development. Excellent teaching and improvements to the provision for outdoor learning ensure that children are well prepared for moving into Year 1. The school-wide focus on developing writing skills has ensured that pupils of all abilities are becoming willing and fluent writers and communicators. Parents commented most positively on the rich experiences offered to their children and told inspectors that school is so enjoyable that the children 'love school...and...cannot wait to get there every morning'. Inspectors agree with their view that 'staff teach the children with real enthusiasm and imagination'. The school encourages a partnership between child and teacher and actively encourages the inclusion of parents. Excellent use is made of existing resources, especially the large outdoor areas where children enjoy playing creatively and developing their physical skills. Children of all nationalities play together in a friendly manner, behave very well and enjoy the opportunities to develop their conversational skills with adults and with one another.

What the school should do to improve further

- Secure the upward trend in standards of attainment, which is now evident in both key stages.
- Review administrative procedures to ensure that suitable checks and balances are in place for all routine tasks.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Standards at the start of Year 1, although considerably higher than the low starting points when pupils enter the school, have generally been below average. The school's data, and inspectors' observations, confirm that pupils in Key Stages 1 and 2 have made good progress in their learning this year. Pupils achieved well, whatever their ability or specific need. Earlier intervention for pupils who are lagging behind has resulted in more of them realising their potential and a greater proportion reaching the higher levels in national tests than in the past. For the second year running, the number of Year 2 pupils who achieved the higher level in their writing (Level 3) has improved. Similarly, in Year 6, the more able pupils are doing well and the proportion achieving the higher levels in class work and national tests (Level 5) is rising steadily. Standards were above average in mathematics in Year 6 and in humanities in Years 1 and 2. A

sizeable proportion of written work on display was of a good quality. The very effective provision for pupils is helping to push standards up steadily. The unvalidated national test and assessment results for 2009 are in line with expectations, an improvement on those for 2007 and 2008. More systematic teaching of reading, and carefully structured writing lessons, are enabling pupils to gain new skills quickly. The school expects this to have a positive impact on future standards.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

The personal development of the pupils, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is outstanding. By the time pupils leave the school, they are articulate and confident learners who accept responsibilities and willingly help others in the school and in the wider community. These qualities prepare them well for their future economic well being. Year 6 pupils act as 'buddies' to look after the needs of those younger than themselves. Pupils show an enthusiasm for corresponding with pupils in a school in Uganda and engage in activities to raise money to buy goats for this overseas community, recognising the economic benefits that this will bring. The school council works for the good of the school, recognising that it can contribute to its development; for example, they have been involved in the planning of the new building extension. One council member stated, 'In this school everyone gets a say in what they want.' Pupils demonstrate respect for themselves and aim to live a healthy life by eating a healthy diet and taking regular exercise. Behaviour around the school, in the playground and dining hall, and in lessons is good and pupils work hard. They are welcoming to visitors and helpful to each other, working together harmoniously. They show great respect for the cultural diversity and religious views of others. Pupils say that they are extremely happy at school and this is reflected in their improved attendance rates, which are now good. Pupils have a good understanding of how to keep safe. They feel safe at school and say that there is very little bullying. They have a trusted adult to confide in if necessary.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Improvements in the quality of teaching since the last inspection mean that most lessons are now of a high quality. This accounts for the increasingly good progress being made this year by pupils across the school and the improved results at the higher levels in national tests. The exceptionally high quality of teaching, for example in mathematics in Year 6 and in literacy in Years 1 and 2, develops pupils' independent learning skills well. An unmistakable enthusiasm for learning is evident in almost every activity that takes place, from the child in the breakfast club excitedly pitting himself against an adult in a game of skill and dexterity, to the joyful singing of a French song by pupils in Years 3 and 4. Parents report that children 'come home full of excitement about what they have been doing'. Highly trained teaching assistants play a significant role in raising standards. Pupils play their part by sharing ideas willingly and listening with maturity to their teachers and to each other. As a result, children are often completely involved in their work, from four-year-olds being prepared by a highly effective teaching assistant for a visit to the wildlife park, to 10- and 11-year-olds creating extraordinarily perceptive insights into the emotions and motivation of a character in a story. The outcomes of the school's approach to teaching fully justify its mantra, 'Live, love, learn and be happy'.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The curriculum is extremely well geared to pupils' language and learning needs and takes full advantage of the extensive grounds to provide an exceptional range of outdoor activities. The school has, deservedly, gained many eco, diversity and curriculum awards. The work of the three curriculum development groups has had a positive impact on the quality of the curriculum, enhancing pupils' enjoyment of learning. That of the global community group has enhanced the celebration of cultural diversity. Literacy and numeracy are brought to life by the imaginative way in which lessons are planned and taught. Personal, health and social education is similarly well planned and delivered. Consequently, pupils' personal development is most effective. The work on 'Treating People' in Years 3 and 4 was especially powerful, reflecting the pupils' excellent moral and social development. French is taught well by a specialist teacher and the hugely enjoyable trip to France reinforced the work in the classroom most effectively. Creative skills are fostered well in art and drama. The creative writing club boosts gifted and talented writers, while the gardening club is a roaring success across the whole school. Pupils celebrate harvest with their own produce and sell the excess for profit. The curriculum is further enriched by a wide-ranging programme of out-of-school activities, residential visits and clubs. There are opportunities to learn a variety of instruments, sing in the choir, play in the orchestra or take part in sporting and other competitive activities.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The school takes great care in looking after the pupils. The ethos is supremely positive, as the parents' feedback overwhelmingly confirmed. 'St Nicholas is a super, caring school with a great sense of community', wrote one, while another said, 'It supports the development of the individual, recognising each child's strengths and weaknesses.' Excellent support is provided for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Teaching assistants are central to this and their efforts are effective and ensure that their pupils progress very well. Academic guidance is good. There is a very successful system in lessons of setting targets for individual pupils and checking that these are achieved, which results in pupils making good progress. Child protection and safeguarding procedures are fully in place and are reviewed regularly. Vulnerable children are well supported through strong links with multiple agencies and organisations. The behaviour policy is consistently implemented across the school and this has had a positive impact on pupils' attitudes to learning. Before- and after-school provision takes advantage of the resources that the school has to offer and provides stimulating activities in a secure and well-managed setting. Extending the building this summer will provide these clubs with welcome additional indoor space.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The leadership team has changed since the last inspection. The deputy headteacher is now the headteacher. A new deputy was appointed and, in September 2008, two assistant headteachers were placed into the management structure. The Early Years Foundation Stage leader is also a member of this team. The headteacher provides outstanding leadership. She is extremely well supported by the relatively new senior leadership team and together they have made a positive

difference to the results achieved this year. They have a clear view of the school's many strengths and are equally clear about the work required to improve standards further. The governing body supports the school effectively. Governors listen to parents' views and provide increasingly comprehensive amounts of information to them. However, they have not reported specifically on meeting the requirements of the disability act and have not regularly communicated the results of the monitoring of the impact of policies on race and gender. The school, rightly, is considering increasing the level of administrative support to ensure that these and all routine administrative tasks are completed as efficiently as those related to teaching and learning.

The real strength of the school lies in the high quality of teamwork and the unwavering commitment of adults to improving the life chances of the pupils. A parent's comment sums this up: 'This is a happy and inclusive school. We love the mix and celebration of different cultures. We appreciate the relaxed, yet effective, leadership style of the headteacher, who puts her trust in parents and very ably uses the resources of the community for the good of the school. The commitment of the staff to the school and the headteacher is remarkable. We feel very lucky to be a part of it.'

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

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?	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?	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	1
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	2
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	1
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	1
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	1
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	1

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/or disabilities make progress	2

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	2
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 learners' needs?	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

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	1
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 eliminated	1
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	1
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

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

01 September 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Nicholas Primary School, Oxford, OX3 0PJ

Thank you so much for welcoming us into your school and showing us your work. We enjoyed our visit and would like to tell you what we found. Yours is a good school. It has some outstanding features.

These are the best things about your school.

- You really enjoy coming to school and love to learn new and exciting things.
- Your attendance has improved a great deal. Well done!
- Your school is a very friendly and pleasant place to learn in. The grounds are wonderful.
- You are especially good at helping people who are new to the school, or from different countries, feel welcome.
- You are making very good progress in your writing now because of the excellent teaching you receive.
- There are many exciting activities on offer, including good clubs and interesting visits.
- Your behaviour is good in lessons and around the school. Well done!
- You have an excellent understanding of how to keep healthy and fit.
- Staff in the main school and in the unit take excellent care of you and provide strong support.
- You make an outstanding contribution to the school and the wider community. You are very proud of having raised enough money to buy goats for a Ugandan village.
- The school is extremely well led by your headteacher and she receives strong support from other adults.
- The school has excellent partnerships with your parents and the community.

There are two areas we have asked the school to improve.

- We agree that the school could get even better results in the national tests. You can help this to happen by continuing to work hard.
- The office staff and the governors are very busy and sometimes they need a bit of help to make sure that they can finish all their work.

Finally, thank you once again for all your help. We wish you all the very best for the future.

Yours faithfully

Cathie Munt

Her Majesty's Inspector