

# St Nicholas' School

Independent School

Inspection report

DCSF Registration Number	304/6059
Unique Reference Number	101572
Inspection number	330429
Inspection dates	4–5 March 2009
Reporting inspector	Daniel Towl HMI

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as amended.

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## Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out by Ofsted under Section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as amended, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

## Information about the school

St Nicholas School is a small, non denominational, independent, preparatory day school for girls and boys aged 3 to 11 years. There are 75 pupils on roll, 25 of whom receive nursery funding. The school is situated in a well established residential area of Kingsbury, north-west London. It was established in 1937 and more recently became part of Happy Child Ltd. New directors took over in 2007. The school was last inspected in 2004. The school has a wide ethnic diversity.

## Evaluation of the school

The school provides a satisfactory quality of education for its pupils. There are a number of strengths and some outstanding features especially in pupils' personal development. Pupils achieve well in the key subjects of English and mathematics. The schools' provision for promoting the welfare, health and safety of pupils is satisfactory. Some required health and safety improvements have been made since the last inspection. There are aspects of the schools' provision that require further improvement in teaching and assessment, premises and information provided for parents. The vast majority of parents are rightly positive about school and what it provides. The school is successful in meeting its main aims, which are to ensure pupils gain entry to a selective secondary school of their choice and to provide a family and supportive atmosphere for learning.

## Quality of education

The curriculum is satisfactory. The school has prepared comprehensive schemes of work for each year group which take into account the two year age range in each class in Key Stages 1 and 2. The curriculum pays due regard to the Early Years Foundation Stage requirements though outside play is underdeveloped. There is a strong emphasis on developing skills in literacy and mathematics and as a result pupils achieve well in these subjects. Pupils achieve particularly well in reading, speaking and listening and arithmetic. These achievements enable them to succeed with their 11-plus exams. Pupils' progress overall is satisfactory. In Years 5 and 6 better progress is more evident, particularly in the development of writing, which is planned through a structured programme from Year 3. Pupils write successfully for a range of purposes across the curriculum.

The curriculum has good breadth. Most subjects of the National Curriculum are taught along with French from an early age and including elocution. There are

limited opportunities for pupils to systematically develop their practical, creative and investigative skills across a range of subjects. There are no extra extra-curricular activities, such as clubs, but pupils do visit places of interest for example museums and theatres; these enrich their experiences. About a quarter of parents commented in their questionnaires that they would like pupils to have a greater range of activities. Older pupils have annual residential visits where they are able to undertake more adventurous activities. A range of visitors come to talk to pupils on topics linked to personal, social and health education (PSHE). The PSHE curriculum is a well organised programme which successfully supports pupils' personal development. Pupils enjoy these lessons.

All pupils have opportunities to use computers, usually once per week, but their skills in information and communication technology (ICT) are under-developed. This is exacerbated by limited resources. Nevertheless, pupils do enhance their work through word processing and they undertake research on the Internet for various projects. Older pupils confirmed in discussions that they do not use ICT 'that much'.

The quality of teaching and assessment including the Early Years Foundation Stage is satisfactory. Pupils and teachers have excellent relationships. Pupils respond to the high expectations of teachers by working hard and persevering with activities. Lessons are mostly well organised. Teachers mostly are prepared and confident in what they do. The small classes mean that pupils receive good individual support, which enables them to move on quickly when they find themselves stuck on tasks. Teachers use every opportunity to develop pupils' vocabulary and this has a very positive effect on their wider English skills and in particular speaking skills. This means they are confident conversationalists.

Lessons often start with question and answer sessions, allowing pupils to successfully recall previous learning. Questions though, do not always probe ideas more deeply following a preliminary answer. While the youngest children sometimes work within groups, pupils from Reception upwards mostly work individually. There are many missed opportunities which would allow pupils to discuss in pairs and small groups. Expecting individual responses sometimes slows the pace of learning too much. Pupils' tasks do not always sufficiently challenge the most able from the start of the lesson. Some work sheets require a minimum response, for example filling in a missing word and these do not make use of the pupils' own skills to respond with independent ideas.

Work is regularly marked and there are sometimes comments made to help pupils improve. This approach is not used consistently but pupils say they find the comments helpful. Teachers regularly record test marks and there is some use of nationally standardised tests. For the youngest children teachers undertake continuous observations. However there is not yet a well developed process to use all this information to inform planning, set learning targets and check progress.

Teaching assistants are not always well deployed to support individuals and groups in order to make the most of learning opportunities.

## Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

The spiritual, social, moral and cultural development is good. This is a strength of the school. Pupils speak favourably about how much they like school, their lessons and friends. This is reflected in their outstanding attitudes towards learning and exemplary behaviour. Most pupils are punctual and their attendance is satisfactory. They are able to distinguish between what is right and wrong and understand the importance of behaving well. They are polite, enthusiastic and happy to talk and share their ideas and feelings appropriately. They get on well with each other, apply themselves well and respond with great appropriateness to questions and requests.

Relationships are respectful and this enables lessons to flow without interruption. Pupils contribute satisfactorily to the life of the school with tasks such as monitor duties and tidying-up after lunch. Older pupils can take on the role of prefect and head pupil. Pupils' questionnaires and discussions showed that they would like more opportunity to have their views listened to. For the wider community, the school raises money for national charities though there is a more limited contribution to the local community and few links with other schools. Their attitudes and good standards in numeracy and literacy prepare them well for the next stage of their education and economic well being.

There are pupils from a wide variety of cultural backgrounds. The PSHE curriculum covers an extensive range of topics which successfully helps pupils to consider other cultures and faiths and how to be a good citizen. Other interesting topics studied include major events such as the Olympics and issues of democracy and government.

## Welfare, health and safety of the pupils

The provision to ensure the welfare, health and safety of pupils is satisfactory. The day to day supervision of pupils is good. Pupils move around the school with care and courtesy and this helps to promote health and safety on a relatively small site. The school has undertaken the appropriate risk assessments and has suitable policies to meet all the regulations. The school needs to be more rigorous in ensuring that policies are being followed, to ensure that all staff receive the appropriate training for child protection and that first aid materials are refreshed and replenished at due intervals.

During discussions with inspectors pupils said that they did not have concerns about bullying and were confident that such matters are dealt with quickly. Pupils learn about keeping healthy through their PSHE programme and can talk confidently about this. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage show good understanding of healthy eating and the importance of dental health and hygiene. Some pupils felt

that the school did not provide enough physical exercise, although older pupils felt the two hours physical education each week was sufficient.

The school has not written a plan to show how it will fulfil its duties under the Disability Discrimination Act 2002

### Suitability of the proprietor and staff

There is a clear procedure and policy for appointing staff. However the school is not rigorous enough in ensuring that its single staff register is kept up-to-date. The school has a single register which shows that key checks on staff have been made but it needs to be more rigorous in completing information such as the date when checks are made and by whom to achieve best practice.

### School's premises and accommodation

The premises are compact and all available space is utilised in order to meet the requirements of the curriculum. Classrooms are of a suitable size for the current numbers of pupils. The outdoor space, while suitable for break times, does not provide a large enough area for team games for the older pupils. The school uses facilities nearby for these more energetic activities. The school does not have an appropriate room for pupils who are ill.

### Provision of information for parents, carers and others

The school provides a range of useful information for parents through its regular newsletters and termly pupil progress reports. The current information supplied to parents has some omissions including the name of the headteacher and information about the qualifications of teachers. The school is aware of these omissions and is due to update its prospectus.

### Procedures for handling complaints

Procedures for handling complaints meet all requirements.

## Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

The effectiveness and leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage are satisfactory. Children start their education in school with knowledge and skills that are generally just above those expected for their age, especially in their speaking and listening skills and in their personal, social and emotional development.

Children respond with enjoyment to the learning environment and apply themselves well. They display positive attitudes towards learning and their behaviour is exemplary. They make satisfactory progress in their learning. By the end of the Reception year they listen well and are confident speakers. The curriculum is broad

and balanced and provides a satisfactory range of tasks for children to consolidate their learning although access to activities using sand and water is limited. Provision for children's personal and social development is good and children make good progress. Curriculum planning is satisfactory but it does not always provide sufficient challenge for the more able nor does it provide enough learning opportunities in the outdoor area to support the development of skills across all the required areas of learning. French enriches the curriculum and provides learning opportunities for children to develop their linguistic skills as well as their cultural experiences. Some work sheets are not well matched to children's abilities and add little to learning.

Teaching is satisfactory, though it sometimes lacks imagination and challenge for the older children, where the formality of the classroom is not conducive to children's collaborative work or the efficient deployment of assistants. Staff make observations of learning and keep samples of children's work to inform future planning, but this information is not used rigorously enough to provide clear learning targets. Relationships are respectful and this significantly supports children's personal development which is good. Staff are sensitive to the children's needs and effectively support their emotional development.

Provision for the welfare health and safety of children is satisfactory. Appropriate risk assessments are undertaken. Children feel safe and valued and can approach members of staff for help and support when required. They are also confident to initiate conversation with visitors and ask about the nature of their visit.

Staff work well in partnership with parents and take into account their advice and views. Adults work well together and are willing to attend to their professional development.

## Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school meets all of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as amended ("the Regulations"), with the exception of those listed below.

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of teaching and assessment (standard 1) and must:

- ensure that lessons in all parts of the school are well planned, have effective teaching methods, suitable activities to challenge pupils of all abilities and make efficient use time and resources (paragraph 1(3)(c))
- make better use of assessment to measure progress and inform lesson planning more rigorously (paragraph 1(3)(d)).

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of the premises and accommodation (standard 5) and must:

- provide appropriate facilities for pupils who are ill (paragraph 5(l)).

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of the provision of information for parents, carers and others (standard 6) and must:

- provide particulars of the headteacher's name (paragraph 6(2)(a))
- include a summary of teachers' qualifications (paragraph 6(2)(k)).

In order to comply with the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 2002 as amended (DDA) the school should devise a three-year accessibility plan.



## Inspection Judgement Recording Form

outstanding	good	satisfactory	inadequate
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### The quality of education

Overall quality of education			✓	
How well the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of pupils			✓	
How effective teaching and assessment are in meeting the full range of pupils' needs			✓	
How well pupils make progress in their learning			✓	

### Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

Quality of provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development		✓		
The behaviour of pupils	✓			

### Welfare, health and safety of pupils

The overall welfare, health and safety of pupils			✓	
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### The quality of the Early Years Foundation Stage provision

How effectively are children in the Early Years Foundation Stage helped to learn and develop?			✓	
How well do children achieve in the Early Years Foundation Stage relative to their starting points and capabilities?			✓	
How good are the personal development and well-being of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage?		✓		
What is the quality of welfare, health and safety of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage?			✓	
How effectively is the provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage led and managed?			✓	
What is the overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage including, where relevant, the quality of childcare?			✓	

## School details

Name of school	St Nicholas' School
DCSF number	304/6059
Unique reference number	101572
Type of school	Preparatory
Status	Independent
Date school opened	1937
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 34      Girls: 34      Total: 68
Number on roll (part-time pupils)	Boys: 2      Girls: 5      Total: 7
Annual fees (day pupils)	Full Day £5760 / Half Day £2955
Address of school	22 Salmon Street Kingsbury London NW9 8PN
Telephone number	020 8205 7153
Email address	<a href="mailto:Stnick.head@happychild.co.uk">Stnick.head@happychild.co.uk</a>
Headteacher	Mrs. Alyce Gregory
Proprietor	Happy Child Group Ltd
Reporting inspector	Daniel Towl HMI
Dates of inspection	4–5 March 2009