

# St Nicolas' CofE Junior School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	114560
<b>Local Authority</b>	Brighton and Hove
<b>Inspection number</b>	338399
<b>Inspection dates</b>	18–19 May 2010
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Rob Crompton

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>	Primary
<b>School category</b>	Voluntary aided
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	7–11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	246
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Fr Richard Rushforth
<b>Headteacher</b>	Andy Richbell
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	17 May 2007
<b>School address</b>	Locks Hill Brighton BN41 2LA
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<b>Email address</b>	head@stnicolas.brighton-hove.sch.uk

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## Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. Eighteen lessons were observed taken by nine teachers and four teaching assistants. Meetings were held with groups of pupils, governors and staff. Inspectors observed the school's work, and looked at curriculum plans, assessment records, minutes of meetings and 70 parental questionnaires.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- the extent to which recent strategies for improving assessment and the quality of teaching are having an impact on pupils' learning and progress
- the effectiveness of the newly structured leadership team on embedding and sustaining improvements.

## Information about the school

The school is about average in size. Most pupils are of White British heritage with a few from minority ethnic groups. English is the first language of all pupils. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is above average. Most of these pupils find learning difficult; some have behavioural and emotional problems or speech, language and communication difficulties. A new headteacher was appointed in September 2009.

**Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate**

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

## Inspection judgements

**Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?**

**3**

**The school's capacity for sustained improvement**

**2**

### Main findings

The school provides a satisfactory and improving quality of education in a warm, purposeful and supportive environment. Pupils behave well and enjoy school. Parents are extremely happy with their children's overall experience. Many made positive comments, including, 'The staff are pro-active, sensitive and encouraging,' 'My children are very happy and have felt welcomed into the school community,' and, 'We simply love this school!'

A drive to improve pupils' learning by introducing new teaching strategies has borne fruit. Teachers successfully engage pupils and encourage them to review their own work. Consequently, pupils know what they need to improve on and, in most lessons, are making good progress. However, their overall achievement is average, as progress has been slower than expected in recent years. Levels of attainment are a little below average, but there are signs of improvement, particularly in the quality of pupils' written work.

A strength of the school is the level of care and the family atmosphere in which all pupils know they are valued. Staff ensure pupils with a wide range of needs are supported and pupils themselves watch out for, and encourage, their classmates if they need help.

Self-evaluation is comprehensive and provides a secure basis for development planning. The headway made on several fronts indicates a good capacity for further improvement. Under the highly effective leadership of the recently appointed headteacher, ably supported by the deputy head, the leadership team rigorously monitors pupils' progress. Learning has improved because the team has successfully encouraged teachers to adopt different classroom strategies such as 'no hands up' questioning and 'learning to learn'. The curriculum is satisfactory and under review. In order to further engage and enthuse pupils, the school is, rightly, exploring how the curriculum can be modified to reflect pupils' interests and provide further opportunities for pupils to practise and consolidate their literacy, numeracy and computer skills in interesting contexts.

Community cohesion is promoted by the good relationships across the school, participation in local events and the school's work with families facing particular difficulties. Pupils gain a reasonable awareness and understanding of different cultures in lessons, but have a limited awareness of Britain as a diverse society. The school is aware that there is scope for broader opportunities and a more systematic approach to engaging with communities beyond the school.

**What does the school need to do to improve further?**

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- Raise standards and accelerate pupils' achievement by sustaining the good quality of learning evident in lessons.
  - Improve the curriculum in order to further interest and engage pupils, by:
    - increasing links between subjects
    - providing further opportunities for pupils to develop their core skills while choosing which aspects of certain topics they wish to explore
    - increasing pupils' access to computers so that pupils can more readily use them across the curriculum.
- Extend opportunities for pupils to gain an understanding of cultural diversity within the United Kingdom by:
  - ensuring that this is given a stronger emphasis in the school's promotion of community cohesion
  - providing first hand experiences for pupils to meet children from different communities and diverse backgrounds
  - developing further links with faith communities.

**Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils****3**

The quality of work seen in lessons and in pupils' books indicates that progress is accelerating and levels of attainment are broadly as expected across the year groups. There is a wide range of attainment in Year 6 but standards are at broadly average levels. Pupils' book reviews indicate a strong interest in reading and include mature comments, such as 'vivid', 'lively' and 'well-constructed'. Pupils are making particular good progress in writing, some demonstrating a particular flair. One boy wrote, 'the sheep, lazily stumbling around the field, like the fluffy white clouds in the blue sky above them'. A girl's poem included the verse:

The old tree stands on wrinkled feet,  
He stares around the fields alone,  
The knarled old hands by his sides,  
And he doesn't want to live any more'.

A strong emphasis on problem solving in mathematics is paying dividends. In Year 3, for example, pupils used their secure knowledge of the two and three times tables to investigate the number of two- and three-legged 'aliens' there could be if the total numbers of legs was 23.

Pupils with specific learning difficulties make good progress towards their individual literacy and numeracy targets due to the effective support they receive. Those pupils whose progress is potentially constrained because they find it difficult to behave appropriately or form positive relationships also benefit from skilled encouragement. This enables them, for the most part, to keep focused in lessons and make good progress.

In class and in the playground, pupils treat each other with respect and fairness, demonstrating that they can take turns, collaborate successfully and share ideas. Pupils enjoy school life and say they feel safe, secure and free from harassment. They know

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what to do about bullying and do not see it as a major issue. Pupils are proud of their contribution to the school through their wide range of roles, such as school councillors, house captains and playground 'buddies'. They have a good understanding of how to keep healthy and take part eagerly in a wide range of sporting activities. Pupils understand the Christian principles which underpin their good respect and consideration for others.

*These are the grades for pupils' outcomes*

<b>Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning</b>	<b>3</b>
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment <sup>1</sup>	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
<b>The extent to which pupils feel safe</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Pupils' behaviour</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being</b>	<b>3</b>
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance <sup>1</sup>	2
<b>The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development</b>	<b>2</b>

### How effective is the provision?

Pupils' increasing confidence in reviewing their own work against specific criteria is making a strong contribution to the quality of their learning. Pupils are helped to do this in a variety of ways. Teachers not only ensure pupils know what to do in lessons but also spell out the key things they are meant to learn. At regular intervals they check pupils' progress through skilful questioning, targeted towards different individuals or groups. Pupils receive excellent feedback through teachers' marking, especially on their written work. Pupils frequently complete a 'target ladder' after marking their own and one another's work and this is further annotated by the teacher. Teachers use this

<sup>1</sup> The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low.

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information to plan lessons which build on pupils' prior learning. They set challenging tasks for different ability groups and are skilled in helping pupils to meet them. Teachers use a wide range of resources effectively. When comparing narrative and information texts in Year 5, for example, pupils' learning was supported extremely well by the use of the interactive whiteboard and carefully chosen texts and cartoons. Innovative strategies in mathematics, such as a 'low threshold/high ceiling' approach, are proving successful in providing tasks which all pupils can tackle, whilst not limiting the more able pupils. Staff are exploring how these methods might enhance other areas of the curriculum. Teaching assistants provide highly effective support for individuals and small groups. For example, a small group of pupils who need help in developing their manipulative skills benefited from accomplished support and warm encouragement as they manipulated putty with their palms and fingers. Such support reflects the school's efforts to ensure all pupils are cared for well. Teaching assistants are familiar with pupils' individual education plans, devised by the special educational needs coordinator. The targets and suggestions within them are not always as well known by class teachers, however, which limit their ability to fine-tune provision on a day-to-day basis.

The school abounds with posters to encourage and motivate pupils, and certificates rewarding their endeavour. Pupils talk proudly of their 'caught reading' and 'learning to learn' awards. A wide range of enrichment activities also stimulates pupils' enjoyment, involvement and sense of belonging. Pupils participate keenly in after school clubs and gain insights from visitors such as the parish priest and local rabbi. Several pupils are learning an instrument and the local authority provides weekly sessions when every pupil in Year 5 plays a keyboard, guitar, brass or percussion instrument. Staff are aware that opportunities for pupils to make connections across subjects and to develop their basic skills across the curriculum are limited, so a curriculum review is underway. Pupils have good computer skills and readily use them for research and presentation. They expressed some frustration, however, about the limited availability of laptops.

*These are the grades for the quality of provision*

<b>The quality of teaching</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
<b>The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness of care, guidance and support</b>	<b>2</b>

**How effective are leadership and management?**

The morale of staff is high and all members of the school community share a strong, determined sense of purpose to meet ambitious targets. Senior leaders have embedded ambition well and are driving improvement successfully. They make good use of the information they gain from tracking pupils' progress and evaluating teaching to identify

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weaknesses and set clear improvement goals. For example, they have strengthened learning in English and mathematics by introducing school-wide initiatives and monitoring their implementation. These strategies are beginning to drive up standards, particularly in English, but will need time to have an impact on overall achievement through the school.

Governors visit regularly and hold discussions with pupils so that they are not just dependent on staff for information on what happens in the classroom. They ensure policies are implemented for the safeguarding of pupils. The committee structure is a little unwieldy, however, which leads to some unnecessary repetition and inefficiencies in the use of time.

The school's commitment to equal opportunities and addressing any discrimination is evident in the way that any discrepancy in the achievement of different groups is quickly identified and addressed. Where individuals need specialist help, staff work in tandem with appropriate agencies and professionals. Community cohesion operates well at the school and parish level, but progress is slow in exploring and promoting understanding of diversity within the wider society.

The school enjoys positive relationships with parents and carers. The vast majority hold the school in high regard. Regular information is provided through newsletters, meetings and an informative website. Parents and carers agree the school is a very secure environment where pupils feel very safe.

*These are the grades for leadership and management*

<b>The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
<b>The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money</b>	<b>3</b>

## Views of parents and carers



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The very large majority of parents and carers are extremely positive about the school, particularly with regard to the teaching and how the school helps their children to enjoy learning and stay safe. Within these positive views, a few raised individual concerns, all of which were relatively minor and not borne out by the inspection.

### Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at St Nicolas CE Junior School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 70 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 245 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	34	49	34	49	2	3	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	44	63	25	36	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	25	36	38	54	6	9	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	24	34	40	57	4	6	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	31	44	36	51	2	3	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	25	36	41	59	1	1	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	31	44	38	54	1	1	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	28	40	36	51	2	3	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	25	36	42	60	0	0	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	27	39	37	53	3	4	1	1
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	28	40	39	56	0	0	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	37	53	32	46	1	1	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	44	63	25	36	0	0	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

## Glossary

### What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

### Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	51	45	0	4
Primary schools	6	41	42	10
Secondary schools	8	34	44	14
Sixth forms	10	37	50	3
Special schools	32	38	25	5
Pupil referral units	12	43	31	14
All schools	9	40	40	10

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above is for the period 1 September to 31 December 2009 and is the most recently published data available (see [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn term 2009 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

## Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.</li> <li>■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.</li> <li>■ The quality of teaching.</li> <li>■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships.</li> <li>■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.</li> </ul>
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

**This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.**



20 May 2010

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Nicolas CE Junior School, Brighton BN41 2LA

You may remember that a team of inspectors visited recently to see how you are getting on. Thank you for making us so welcome. It was good to talk to the school council and to chat with some of you at break and over lunch. We saw how much you enjoy lessons and all the extra activities. You are now learning well not only because of the good teaching but also because you are trying really hard to improve. The school has lots of good features but, because there is still some catching up to do to ensure you all achieve as well as you can, we have judged the school as satisfactory overall.

These are the things that we found were particularly good.

- You behave well and understand how important it is to stay safe and healthy.
- You know your targets and this is helping you to make good progress.
- Those of you who find learning difficult have good support.
- Your headteacher, staff and governors are always looking for ways to make the school better.

We have suggested these things which the school needs to do now.

- Keep on helping you 'learn how to learn'.
- Use some of the ways that have helped you to improve in English and mathematics in other lessons, such as history and geography.
- Provide opportunities for you to practise your literacy, numeracy and computer skills while learning about things that interest you.
- Visit other areas to find out what makes different communities tick

You can help by contributing your ideas about what helps you learn and what you would like to find out about. Thank you again for your help and best wishes for the future.

Yours sincerely

Rob Crompton

Lead inspector

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