

# Inspection of a good school: St Nicholas' School

Holm Oak Close, Nunnery Fields, Canterbury, Kent CT1 3JJ

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Inspection dates:

6 and 7 February 2024

## Outcome

St Nicholas' School continues to be a good school.

## What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils and their families are deeply appreciative of St Nicholas' School. Many parents and carers wrote of the positive impact of the school on their children and their families' lives. In the words of one parent: 'The school is fantastic – so supportive of both children and adults... he's happy, safe, well looked after and challenged to be the best he can be.'

The atmosphere at the main school site is one of positivity and happiness. Pupils demonstrate their sense of safety and well-being through vocalisations, movement, smiles, laughter and words. Pupils attending the range of satellite provisions, including the sixth form, are also happy and confident that they are safe. Pupils know who to go should they need help or advice.

Most pupils manage their emotions well. Across the school, there is extensive support for well-being and opportunities for pupils to learn about self-regulation and to practise helpful techniques. Staff are highly skilled in supporting pupils whose behaviour becomes dysregulated. Consequently, lessons proceed smoothly.

Staff are ambitious for pupils' future lives. Individual education, health and care (EHC) plan outcomes are broken down into appropriate steps of learning. Progress towards these steps is closely monitored. New targets are identified according to each pupil's progress.

## What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

The St Nicholas' School curriculum is uniquely designed to meet the needs of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Different pathways provide for pupils with similar specific needs. For example, Cedar pathway offers a sensory curriculum, while pupils in the Oak pathway follow an adapted version of the national curriculum.

From Reception onwards, there is a strong focus on communication and interaction, including reading. Staff are trained effectively in various methods of communication, such

as signing and picture exchange systems, as well as in phonics. Staff plan activities expertly that engage pupils and entice them to practise and extend their communication and reading skills. For example, in Beech pathway, pupils selected an item from a 'feely box'. They considered what the item was, what sound the item started with and what letter corresponded with that sound. In a group activity, pupils successfully used communication boards to give directions, such as 'X, pour water down the pipe.' Pupils were delighted when their directions were followed. Consistently effective approaches to teaching reading are embedding. Consequently, pupils' acquisition of phonics and early reading skills is strengthening. Pupils of all ages make good progress with communication and interaction.

The school's curriculum is under review. In certain pathways, including in the sixth form, the school has identified what pupils should learn over time. In other cases, there is insufficient clarity about precisely what pupils should learn and how this will build as pupils progress through the pathway. Alongside the review of curriculum content, the school is reviewing staff roles and responsibilities. This is to ensure that, in each pathway, there is appropriate accountability for the detail of the curriculum, its implementation and its impact on pupils' achievement. These aspects have not been as strong as they could have been in the past.

Staff use questioning and observation well. They meticulously note pupils' responses to different learning activities and use this information to plan next steps. New, school-wide systems to review pupils' achievement over longer periods are in the early stages of implementation.

Behaviour in lessons is positive. Pupils, including in the early years and sixth form, know and follow established daily routines. A small number of pupils have individual behaviour plans. These enable staff, pupils and families to work effectively together to identify what works best, and to provide consistent support. Staff support behaviour well. They ensure that pupils are safe and that learning is not disrupted. 'Safe spaces' exist on the main school site and at the sixth form. Each use of a 'safe space' is carefully recorded and reviewed. Pupils are supported to reflect on what happened, on what they did and on what they can do differently next time.

The school works successfully to secure good attendance by ensuring that every class offers a safe, welcoming and supportive environment. The school's attendance mantra, 'Every Moment Matters and Every Day Counts', is widely known. Where pupils have low attendance, additional support is identified and provided to ensure that pupils access as much time in school as possible.

The school views wider opportunities for pupils' development as essential. Work in this regard is of high quality and contributes very well to pupils' learning. For example, trips into the local community, participation in award schemes and forest school support pupils to build confidence and to develop positive relationships. Additionally, the qualified and experienced well-being team offers complementary opportunities, including creative therapies and mental health first-aid groups.

Support for well-being extends to staff. The school and governing body are keenly aware of the potential impact of recent changes on staff. The school has ensured that staff are well informed and have opportunities to participate in decision-making. Moreover, the well-being team offers staff well-being sessions and one-to-one support.

The governing body is exceptionally well informed and strategic in approach. Governors know about education priorities and challenges nationally, locally and in their own school. Governors' oversight of school improvement is systematic and rigorous.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

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

### **(Information for the school and appropriate authority)**

- The curriculum in different pathways does not consistently identify what pupils should learn or how learning should build year-on-year. This means that pupils may not learn as well as they could. The school should ensure that all pathways offer a clearly sequenced curriculum that identifies the knowledge that pupils should learn and how this builds over time.
- Over time, oversight of the curriculum and its impact on pupils' achievement has lacked rigour. Consequently, opportunities to assure and improve the quality of education that pupils receive have been missed. Roles and responsibilities within pathways are currently under review. The school should ensure that the review is completed swiftly so that clear accountability for monitoring, and responding to, the quality and impact of the curriculum is established.

## **Background**

When we have judged a school to be good, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains good. This is called an ungraded inspection, and it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection, which is carried out under section 5 of the Act. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the ungraded inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

This is the second ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be good in March 2014.

## How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

## Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

## School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	119059
<b>Local authority</b>	Kent
<b>Inspection number</b>	10296286
<b>Type of school</b>	Special
<b>School category</b>	Community special
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	4 to 19
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	353
<b>Of which, number on roll in the sixth form</b>	25
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair of governing body</b>	Nigel Wootton
<b>Headteacher</b>	Richard Dalton
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.st-nicholas.kent.sch.uk">www.st-nicholas.kent.sch.uk</a>
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	12 July 2018, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

## Information about this school

- A new headteacher commenced in post in September 2022.
- St Nicholas School is the district special school for pupils aged 4 to 19 years. All pupils have profound, severe and/or complex special educational needs and/or disabilities. All pupils have an EHC plan.
- In addition to the main school site, the school has seven satellite provisions at the following addresses:
  - St John's Primary School, 7 St John's Place, Canterbury CT1 1BD
  - Parkside Primary School, Tennyson Avenue, Sturry CT1 1EP
  - Chartham Primary School, Shalmsford Street, Chartham, Canterbury CT4 7QN
  - Canterbury Primary School, City View, Franklyn Road, Canterbury CT2 8PT
  - Spires Academy, Bredlands Lane, Canterbury CT2 0HD

Canterbury Academy, Knight Avenue, Canterbury CT2 8QA

Canterbury College, New Dover Road, Canterbury CT1 3AJ

- The school does not use any alternative providers.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical educational qualifications and apprenticeships.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.
- This was the first routine inspection since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher and other members of the leadership team. The lead inspector met virtually with the deputy headteacher, who was on a residential school trip to Finland. Inspectors also met with groups of governors, teachers, support staff and parents.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in: Oak, Willow, Cedar and Beech pathways. Inspectors discussed the curriculum with pathway leaders and looked at pathway plans. Inspectors spoke to teachers and visited a sample of lessons, including at satellite sites. In Oak and Willow pathways, inspectors also looked at pupils' work and spoke to pupils about their learning.
- Inspectors also met with leaders to discuss the provision in the early years and sixth form. Inspectors visited the early years and sixth-form provisions at their satellite locations. Inspectors spoke to staff and pupils about learning.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff, pupils and parents; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- Inspectors considered the 35 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Ofsted Parent View. They also considered the 17 responses to the Ofsted pupil survey and 72 responses to the Ofsted survey for school staff.

## Inspection team

Hilary Macdonald, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Elaine Parkinson	Ofsted Inspector
Graham Chisnell	Ofsted Inspector
Shaun Jarvis	Ofsted Inspector

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