



St Nicholas' School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 119059
LEA Kent
Inspection number 280451
Inspection dates 12 July 2006 to 12 July 2006
Reporting inspector Mark Evans AI

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

Type of school	Special	School address	Holme Oak Close
School category	Non-maintained special		Nunnery Fields
Age range of pupils	4 to 19		Canterbury, Kent CT1 3JJ
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01227 464316
Number on roll	128	Fax number	01227 766883
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mr Roger O'Shea
Date of previous inspection	12 June 2000	Headteacher	Mr Daniel Lewis

Age group 4 to 19	Inspection dates 12 July 2006 - 12 July 2006	Inspection number 280451
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The school provides for children who have statements of special educational needs and have profound, severe or complex learning difficulties, including autism. It has increased in size by a quarter since the last inspection. One in five pupils attends the separate off-site provision for 16-19 years old. The others are roughly evenly split between the primary and secondary departments. There is a mix of socio-economic backgrounds, with about a quarter of pupils receiving free school meals. Significant building work at the school started earlier this year and is ongoing.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

St Nicholas' Special School provides a satisfactory education, with good care. It is a safe, caring and friendly place in which pupils are happy; almost all really enjoy being there. Pupils make satisfactory progress in meeting their individual academic targets. Many make good progress in some respects, for example in their personal development, and in the Foundation Stage. Teaching is satisfactory. Care, guidance and support are good, but information on what the pupils have learned is not used consistently well by staff when planning what they should learn next, and information on the progress made by different groups of pupils is not as widely understood as it should be. The school judged its own overall effectiveness to be higher than the inspectors did, but the areas that were identified by the school for further development are appropriate and match those of the inspectors.

The curriculum provided by the school is good. It is particularly strong in providing for the personal and social needs of pupils. This is a key reason why the pupils' personal development and behaviour are good. There is an exciting and varied Foundation Stage curriculum and a good range of accreditation for the older pupils.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. Recent innovations are beginning to impact positively, for example in improving the quality of teaching. However, monitoring of teaching is still not focused sharply enough on improving pupils' achievement. The headteacher, deputy headteacher and senior management team have successfully protected the happiness and contentment of the pupils during a tricky period of school expansion and building work and the school has improved well since the last inspection, for example in extending the range of accredited courses available to the older pupils. The capacity to improve further is satisfactory. The school provides satisfactory value for money.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 3

The provision for students aged 16 to 19 is satisfactory. Again, the school judged its own overall effectiveness to be higher than the inspectors did, but the areas that were identified for further development are appropriate and match those of the inspectors. Students make satisfactory progress. They develop their independence skills further and benefit from the good links with other organisations that help them develop confidence in contexts other than school. The transition between school and college/work is effective. The new building on the campus of Canterbury College is of high quality.

What the school should do to improve further

- improve the quality of teaching by sharpening up the monitoring of all aspects, including setting of targets, so that staff are better able to improve pupils' achievement and progress

- make more effective and consistent use of the information on what pupils learn, in order to help them make better progress and reach higher standards.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Pupils' achievement is satisfactory in the context of their learning difficulties and disabilities, but understandably, standards are far below national averages. Some pupils make good progress across a range of subjects and meet the targets set for them by their teachers. However, a few individual pupils do not achieve as much as they could, usually because the work set for them is not as well matched to their needs as it should be. The youngest pupils make good progress because of an exciting and varied curriculum. Further up the school, pupils and students make satisfactory progress in academic terms, and do well in developing their personal and social skills. This encourages them in other parts of their lives and contributes to the happy atmosphere of the school. As pupils mature, they gradually achieve more with less support from adults. Achievement of independent living skills is, for many pupils and students, a key element of the success of the school. Parents report that they are very pleased with the progress made by their children.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The personal development and well-being of pupils are good. They enjoy their lessons and take part willingly in all aspects of school life. They behave well in and around the school, and older pupils often help younger ones. For example, the secondary pupils made and served fruit smoothies for the younger ones, so that they had a cool, healthy drink after competing in their sports day. Primary pupils benefit from good reward systems. Clear classroom rules help them to understand what is required of them. They are polite to visitors and respond well to their teachers.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. They are developing a good understanding of faiths and cultures that are different from their own. The recent whole-school study of life in India has enabled pupils of all ages to look at all aspects of that country, and has resulted in many good pieces of work reflecting Indian culture. Pupils' self-confidence is good, and their attendance is satisfactory. Pupils show good awareness of safety, and they are adopting healthy lifestyles, in line with a new school initiative. All pupils have many good opportunities to visit the local area and places of interest. This is helping to raise good awareness of the locality. Workplace skills are developing well. Pupils know how to keep their own things tidy. They help to clear up after lessons, and many are able to take responsibility for their own belongings. Older ones engage in work experience practices, both in school and in the local area. Consequently they are well prepared for the next stage of their education and later life.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Staff understand the needs of their pupils and enjoy helping them to learn. Relationships are strong, which supports the pupils' learning. There is good use of a range of teaching methods. Teaching assistants add to the quality of the provision. The best teaching is clearly focused on helping pupils to learn specific skills or knowledge; it is often exciting and fun for the pupils. Less effective teaching occurs when lessons are not sufficiently well paced so that pupils' attention drifts away. Sometimes the use of resources is not as good as it could be, which makes it more difficult for pupils to focus.

Teachers work hard to assess and monitor pupils' progress but the information they collect is not used consistently enough to ensure that learning is as good as it could be. Although there have already been improvements in the analysis of assessments, it is still not used rigorously enough throughout the school. The school is aware of this, and has nearly completed the development of its own software that will assist all staff in ensuring that their teaching is as effective as possible.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum provided by the school is good. It is broad, balanced and relevant. It is particularly strong in providing for the personal needs of pupils, resulting in good personal development. The wide range of activities planned help to ensure that all age and ability groups are suitably provided for, though occasionally work is not as well matched to pupils' needs as it should be. The good Foundation Stage curriculum ensures that pupils get off to a flying start, and a multi-sensory approach ensures that they make good gains in their learning. The curriculum for pupils in the main school is enriched by many exciting additional experiences that help them improve their social skills effectively. For example, pupils in the older classes say they enjoy French and the drama productions that they are involved in. Younger pupils enjoy the many visits to local places of interest where they learn to interact with the local community. There is a good range of accreditation for the older pupils. Work experience provides an appropriate awareness of the world of work. The programme for students aged 16-19 is good, supporting them well as they learn to be as independent as possible.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The quality of care provided by the school for all its pupils is good. All requirements for children's protection, health and safety are firmly in place. Staff know their pupils well and the high staffing levels in classrooms ensure that pupils are well cared for. The calm ethos and well ordered environment ensure that pupils feel safe and secure.

The school provides good support for pupils' emotional and personal needs. There are very good links with support services, and multi-agency liaison is effective in ensuring that any difficulties are quickly dealt with. For example, the school is working very closely with parents and the support services to ensure that pupils come to school regularly. This is helping to improve attendance. Good systems are in place to help older pupils in particular to become more independent in their learning. They are provided with good quality advice and guidance about their futures, and about their options. Monitoring of pupils' academic achievements is satisfactory overall. Individual education plans are usually clear and provide well for individuals' needs. However, there are some inconsistencies in the monitoring of these plans, and it is not always clear if targets have been achieved.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The headteacher, deputy headteacher and senior management team lead the school well and many of the recent innovations they have introduced are beginning to impact positively, for example in improving the quality of teaching and in supporting better attendance. They have managed competently through a difficult period as the school has expanded and developed. The staff place a real emphasis on making sure the pupils have equal access to learning, whatever their needs and disabilities, and that they are happy and contented in spite of the changes and building work going on around them.

The school's self-evaluation and monitoring processes are satisfactory, and take into account the views of interested parties such as parents and governors. As a result, the school development plan outlines future developments clearly and appropriately. However, although there is evidence that the monitoring of teaching has already improved its quality, the lack of sharp focus on improving pupils' achievement explains why the school's view of its own overall effectiveness was too high.

The governing body provides sound support for the school and has a good system of visiting the school in pairs to better pursue a particular focus on a subject or aspect of school life.

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Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall	16-19
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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?	3	3
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	2
The quality and standards in foundation stage	2	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	Yes
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3	3

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The behaviour of learners	2	2
The attendance of learners	3	
How well learners enjoy their education	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	2

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3	
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	3	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	2
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	3	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3	
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	Yes

The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy	
Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily	Yes
Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise	Yes
Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse	Yes
Learners are educated about sexual health	Yes
The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe	
Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements	Yes
Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place	Yes
Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism	Yes
Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them	Yes
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution	
Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships	Yes
Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them	Yes
Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community	Yes
The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being	
There is provision to promote learners' basic skills	Yes
Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams	Yes
Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in key stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form	Yes
Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy	Yes

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Hello everyone – you may have noticed Denise and me at your school earlier this month. Some of you were kind enough to talk to us. Others of you saw us in lessons or around the school or at college. Thank you for making us welcome, for showing me your work and for telling us about your school.

After our day with you, we are clear that St Nicholas' provides good care and a satisfactory education.

I have written a report that says what the school does well, and also what it could do even better. Some of the things in the report match the things you told us about, like being happy at school and feeling safe. We were impressed with the way that the teachers and TAs look after you, and the progress you all make in your personal and social skills. I also talked to staff about ways of making the school even better. The first is to look more closely at how teaching best supports your learning. The other is to use what the teachers know about what you have learned, to help you learn even more effectively.

I hope that explains a little bit about what we were doing at St Nicholas'. We really enjoyed our day there - thank you again for making us feel so welcome.