

St Nicholas School

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

Inspection dates 19–20 March 2014

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|--------------------------------|----------------------|--------------|----------|
| Overall effectiveness | Previous inspection: | Satisfactory | 3 |
| | This inspection: | Good | 2 |
| Achievement of pupils | | Good | 2 |
| Quality of teaching | | Good | 2 |
| Behaviour and safety of pupils | | Good | 2 |
| Leadership and management | | Good | 2 |

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Leadership and management are good. Through robust monitoring, the headteacher and senior team have improved the quality of teaching and learning.
- Pupils make good progress over time, particularly in English and mathematics. They make significant gains in their personal and social development because of the excellent enrichment activities that are available.
- Children make outstanding progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage.
- The sixth form is outstanding and provides excellent opportunities for students to put their work skills into practice in the local community.
- The school has developed an innovative range of strategies and methods to meet the needs of the less able pupils very well.
- Good teaching successfully ensures that the majority of pupils make good progress in literacy and numeracy.
- Pupils are kept safe and their behaviour is good as a result of effective management and the sensitive care and support provided by staff.
- Effective partnerships with other educational providers enhance the excellent range of lessons.
- Staff share their expertise with other teachers through an extensive programme of outreach training and support, in partnership with the local authority.
- The governing body has made significant improvements to its organisation and work since the last inspection, and is now well placed to support and challenge the school to improve even further.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Not enough teaching is outstanding because the quality of marking and feedback to pupils about how to improve is not consistent across the school.
- Pupils' progress in reading is slower than it should be, because the teaching of sounds that letters make (phonics) is not yet fully embedded across the school.
- Middle leaders do not routinely monitor the quality of teaching in their areas and, as a result, are not always able to offer focused support and coaching to teachers.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors visited 21 lessons, all of which were observed jointly with senior leaders.
- Meetings were held with the Chair of the Governing Body and three other governors, two governors responsible for safeguarding, a representative from the local authority, the headteacher and middle leaders.
- Informal discussions were held with groups of learners from each key stage, and included hearing pupils read.
- There were 21 submissions to the online questionnaire (Parent View). Inspectors took account of the school's own surveys of parents and carers. Returns from 98 questionnaires completed by staff were also considered.
- Inspectors considered a range of evidence, including the school's development plan and self-evaluation, monitoring reports, performance management records, policies on child protection and special educational needs, case studies, pupil premium records, the sports premium action plan, attendance records, governor reports, safeguarding information, school displays and records relating to behaviour and safety.

Inspection team

| | |
|------------------------------|----------------------|
| Richard Hill, Lead inspector | Additional Inspector |
| Jason Hughes | Additional Inspector |
| Carol Vant | Additional Inspector |

Full report

Information about this school

- St Nicholas School is a special school for children and young people with severe and profound learning difficulties. The majority of pupils have a diagnosis of autism and/or complex physical and sensory needs.
- Pupils are generally admitted from nurseries and maintained schools across Kent. All pupils have a statement of special educational needs.
- A very large majority of the pupils are of White British heritage. A few pupils are from ethnic minority backgrounds. Almost all of the pupils speak English as their first language. The majority of pupils are boys.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium (those eligible for free school meals, those in care and those with a parent or carer in the armed services) is above average. Sixteen pupils are in the care of the local authority. Very few of the pupils in the school are from service families
- All Year 7 pupils are eligible for the Year 7 catch-up premium funding.
- Around one in ten pupils across the school are involved with the local Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) as a result of their behavioural needs.
- The school works in partnership with many different organisations, including the local authority, University of Kent, Canterbury Christchurch University, Oast House Trust, East Kent Health Authority and Abbey Court School.
- In addition to the provision offered at St Nicholas School, a few pupils attend satellite classes in four local secondary schools.
- Students in the sixth form attend classes at Canterbury College on a full-time basis.
- Due to their complex medical needs, a very small minority of pupils on roll at the school receive home tutoring from the St Nicholas School outreach service.
- The school offers a range of qualifications and awards. It does not enter pupils early for any examinations.
- The school was recently awarded the Investors in People accreditation for the third time.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement by:
 - ensuring that feedback and marking are used more consistently by teachers to show pupils how to improve their literacy and numeracy skills
 - ensuring that all pupils develop their ability to use their knowledge of phonics to improve their reading and writing skills
 - giving pupils more opportunities to practise and apply their literacy, communication and numeracy skills in other subjects.
- Improve the impact of leaders on pupils' achievement by:
 - analysing information on pupils' achievement in more detail so that their progress is scrutinised in greater depth
 - involving middle leaders more productively in monitoring the quality of teaching so that they can offer targeted coaching and support for staff.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Children enter the school with skills that are well below those expected for their age because of their complex needs. As a result of careful monitoring of progress and teaching, the majority of pupils in the main school, including those from minority ethnic backgrounds, make good progress from their starting points.
- Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage make outstanding progress because of the excellent use of assessment to set challenging targets for each pupil.
- As a result of the effective support for learning that is given in lessons, there are no significant differences in the rates of progress between boys and girls or those with different levels of learning difficulties. Pupils known to be eligible for free school meals, and the few looked after by the local authority, achieve at least as well as their peers. Year 7 pupils supported by additional funding to improve their literacy and numeracy skills make similarly good progress. As a result, the gap between their achievement and that of their peers is closing.
- In the most effective teaching, pupils make good progress in their learning and develop excellent social and life skills. This confirms the school's judgement based on detailed checking of how well the pupils are doing overtime. The school's own information about achievement is externally checked and shows that all groups achieve equally well.
- Progress in reading for the most able pupils across the school is good. They eagerly read to the inspectors and were able to use their phonics knowledge to identify and read new words accurately. Pupils in Reception and those in Key Stages 1 and 2 develop their ability to use sounds to work out words. However, this is not consistently followed in Key Stages 3 and 4, which slows the progress of some pupils in literacy and other subjects.
- Pupils, who are not yet able to read, use symbols to support their literacy development and, as a result, make good gains in their learning. They make good progress with their communication because of the consistent use of signing and visual communication symbols by staff.
- Pupils confidently use modern technologies in all subject areas. For example, in a Year 7 literacy lesson, pupils used the interactive whiteboard to correctly select pictures of objects beginning with a specified letter sound.
- Most pupils achieve well in numeracy and literacy because of the opportunities offered to them to practise their skills in a variety of activities. However, achievement is not yet outstanding because some pupils are not given enough opportunities to practise their literacy and numeracy skills in other subjects.
- Pupils enjoy taking part in a wide range of exciting, creative and sporting activities, such as dance, pottery, trampolining, cycling, wall climbing, boxing and hydrotherapy relaxation. Pupils with more profound physical difficulties benefit from an extensive range of specialist therapies to enable them to make excellent progress in their self-help skills and physical development.
- The most able pupils at Key Stages 3 and 4 have regular opportunities to join lessons with students at local secondary schools. These sessions ensure that the pupils are appropriately challenged, both academically and socially; as a result they make good progress in their learning. By the end of Year 11, most pupils gain a range of academic and work-related qualifications.
- A small minority of pupils leave school at the end of Year 11 to take up placements at the local college. The majority of pupils continue their education in the sixth form, which is based at the local college. These pupils make outstanding progress in both their learning and development of social skills, as a result of the excellent teaching, support and guidance that they are given. They achieve well in a range of vocational and academic subjects and leave the school well prepared for the next stage of their life.
- The school continues to track the progress of students once they have left St Nicholas School and, where needed, offers support and guidance to the student and the college staff in order to ensure continued success.
- Parents and carers are rightly very pleased with their children's progress.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching throughout the school is typically good and leads to good achievement and progress in all subjects, particularly English and mathematics.
- Teaching and assessment in the Early Years Foundation Stage and the sixth form are very strong, because activities are set at the correct level which helps to maintain pupils' interest and enthusiasm.
- Staff use praise and rewards effectively to encourage the pupils to develop positive attitudes to learning and to other people. Teachers know the strengths, needs and interests of each pupil very well and relationships are very positive.
- The majority of pupils, including the most able, make good progress because learning is carefully monitored and activities are appropriately adjusted to help pupils to overcome difficulties.
- Additional adults make a positive contribution to pupils' learning because they skilfully encourage communication, support reading, promote interaction and show pupils how to complete tasks successfully. However, occasionally, pupils are given learning activities that are too difficult for them to complete successfully, even with help.
- Teachers have developed their expertise in using sensory resources and specialist programmes to enhance the learning and physical development of pupils with physical difficulties or profound and multiple learning difficulties. As a result, these pupils make small, but significant, steps in their learning.
- In the sixth form, good quality feedback and marking help students know what they need to do next to improve. However, in the rest of the school, although teachers use assessment effectively to track the progress of individual pupils, marking is inconsistent, and teachers mainly use verbal feedback to help pupils know how to improve. As a result, this hampers pupils' ability to make faster progress in literacy and numeracy because pupils do not have a record of how to improve from lesson to lesson.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- The behaviour of pupils is good. They benefit from high levels of sensitive staff supervision and are well supported by effective routines. Incidents of negative behaviour are reducing year on year as a result of the effective actions taken by the school to improve the management of behaviour. There have been no exclusions for the past three years.
- The behaviour of pupils who attend classes in the mainstream schools and the sixth form college is outstanding. The number of recorded incidents for these pupils is low compared to those of their peers in the main school.
- Pupils' attitudes to learning are positive and pupils work together well in lessons, often helping each other if they do not understand the task. They enjoy sharing their achievements with other pupils and celebrating success in the weekly assembly.
- Pupils treat their classrooms with respect and regularly get involved in litter patrols and recycling activities around the school. They are delighted with everything that the school has to offer, and wear their school uniform with pride.
- Older pupils say that they like attending because of all the friends they have. They say that the school is a safe place to be and confirm that there is no bullying. Pupils know about the importance of how to stay safe whilst using the internet and can confidently explain what they need to do if they feel unhappy or unsafe.
- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. In lessons, pupils learn to keep themselves safe and to use tools and electrical equipment appropriately. They participate in specific courses to help them to develop the important skills for moving on to the next stage of their lives, for example when using public transport.
- Although a very small minority of parents expressed a concern about behaviour, almost all who

responded to the questionnaire believe that behaviour is well managed and that their child is happy at school. A small minority of staff expressed concerns regarding the consistent application of the behaviour policy. The school has firm plans in place for further staff training regarding this.

- Attendance is in line with mainstream schools nationally. Where pupils have high absence rates, this is usually because of complex medical needs or hospitalisation. The school follows up absences on the first day and involves external agencies where appropriate.
- Excellent guidance and support offered by the school help pupils in Year 11 and the sixth form to extend their awareness of the wider world and make positive decisions about their future.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is well promoted across all subjects. The school encourages pupils to work and play together productively. Educational trips into the local community, residential experiences, working in local businesses, and taking part in initiatives such as the Imagining Autism project with the University of Kent, all help to develop pupils' understanding of the multicultural world.
- High quality care for all pupils is central to the school's values, and this ensures that any concerns are well documented and acted upon. The school complies with all statutory requirements, including those for safeguarding, and there are robust procedures for reviewing and evaluating all policies. Appropriate training is offered to all staff, including those new to the school, and governors in relation to health and safety, safeguarding, e-safety, child protection, and risk assessment. As a result, safeguarding and safe recruitment of staff are excellent.
- Behaviour and safety are not yet outstanding because a number of pupils are over reliant on adults for support in order to stay focused during lessons.

The leadership and management

are good

- Through their clear vision and positive values that prioritise equal opportunities for all, the headteacher and senior leadership team have created a culture of high expectations and ambition for all pupils, irrespective of their learning difficulty, race or gender.
- Since the last inspection, the senior leadership team has developed and implemented a broad range of strategies for monitoring teaching and learning in all subjects, particularly in English and mathematics. Outcomes from this monitoring are used appropriately to target staff training and, consequently, the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement have improved year on year.
- However, although information on pupils' achievement is collected, the school does not routinely evaluate pupils' progress in speaking and listening, reading, writing, and numeracy. As a result, leaders are not always able to accurately identify the impact of training and resources on pupils' learning. Performance management is closely linked to the Teachers' Standards and is robustly used to raise the quality of teaching and learning and to make decisions about pay progression. Underachievement is effectively tackled and well supported through training and coaching.
- Leadership in both the Early Years Foundation Stage and the sixth form are highly effective, resulting in pupils' outstanding achievement and progress. In other areas of the school, middle leaders monitor the achievement of the pupils by comparing teachers' assessments with those of teachers in other schools. They discuss pupils' progress with teachers in order to identify which pupils are at risk of not achieving their targets in literacy and numeracy.
- However, middle leaders are not fully involved in monitoring the quality of teaching and are at an early stage in supporting teachers in improving their classroom practice through coaching and mentoring. The school has already identified this as an area for development in its improvement plan.
- The exceptional range of subjects offered to all the pupils is a strength of the school. The creative, physical and sporting enrichment activities and clubs that are regularly available enable the pupils to practise their learning and develop effective personal and communication skills.
- Leaders ensure that additional funding is well used and is making a positive impact. However, although the sports premium is helping to develop the pupils' physical and sporting skills, expenditure has been mainly targeted on providing activities, resources and external coaching.

Consequently, the school has firm plans to use future funding for staff training in order to ensure that current achievements can be sustained when the funding ceases.

- The school has been effectively supported by the local authority to improve teaching and learning and is now seen as a significant part of Kent County Council's strategy for improving the achievement of pupils with special educational needs in mainstream schools.

■ **The governance of the school:**

- The governing body has taken robust action to improve since the last inspection, including recruiting new members from a wide range of backgrounds, and is now well placed to challenge and support the school in moving forward. All policies and procedures are now in place and, following a detailed self-review, an action plan for further development has been established. As a result of good training in how to interpret information about pupils' progress, and how it compares with other schools nationally, governors are able to contribute well to discussions about the quality of teaching and learning. Through this, they have developed a good understanding of the values, strengths and improvement needs of the school.
- Governors are knowledgeable about how the school is using additional funding to raise pupils' achievement in literacy and numeracy. However, they are less clear about how the sports premium is being used to ensure sustained improvement in sport and physical education.
- Governors have good procedures for monitoring the impact of appraisal for the headteacher and other staff, including the link between performance and salary progression. They are currently working with the senior leadership team to devise appropriate criteria for pay progression at varying stages of a teacher's career.

What inspection judgements mean

| School | | |
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| Grade | Judgement | Description |
| Grade 1 | Outstanding | An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment. |
| Grade 2 | Good | A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment. |
| Grade 3 | Requires improvement | A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection. |
| Grade 4 | Inadequate | <p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> |

School details

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| Unique reference number | 119059 |
| Local authority | Kent |
| Inspection number | 426395 |

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

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| Type of school | Special |
| School category | Community |
| Age range of pupils | 4–19 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Gender of pupils in the sixth form | Mixed |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | 205 |
| Of which, number on roll in sixth form | 37 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Alison Ekins |
| Headteacher | Daniel Lewis |
| Date of previous school inspection | 5–6 October 2011 |
| Telephone number | 01227 464316 |
| Fax number | 01227 766883 |
| Email address | headteacher@st-nicholas.kent.sch.uk |

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