

St Nicolas' CofE Junior School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	114560
Local Authority	Brighton and Hove
Inspection number	289967
Inspection dates	17–18 May 2007
Reporting inspector	Selwyn Ward

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

Type of school	Junior
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	7–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	252
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Richard Rushforth
Headteacher	Trevor Cristin
Date of previous school inspection	1 February 2002
School address	Locks Hill Portslade Brighton BN41 2LA
Telephone number	01273 418026
Fax number	01273 430209

Age group	7–11
Inspection dates	17–18 May 2007
Inspection number	289967

© Crown copyright 2007

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This school is larger than average. Pupils come from a wide range of backgrounds. The number of pupils with learning difficulties is a little above average, but a higher number than in most schools have statements of special educational needs. Pupils' attainment is broadly average when they join the school. The school is currently undergoing major building works.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

St Nicolas' provides a sound education for its pupils. It is led and managed well and, as a result, it is improving. The headteacher, governors and school leadership team have been particularly effective in creating a school with an ethos where pupils feel very secure and grow in confidence. Parents strongly value this positive and supportive ethos, which they see as part of the school's Christian mission. As one of the many who wrote to inspectors put it, 'You feel as a parent that all staff really care about the children and their families'. Another observed that 'children's emotional well-being is considered as much as their learning needs'. The school's good care, guidance and support result in pupils' good personal development and well-being. Pupils behave very well and relationships throughout the school are happy and harmonious. School leaders have very successfully tackled the issues for improvement identified in the last inspection, on information and communication technology (ICT), attendance and the school's partnership with parents. These have all been tremendously improved. This is especially so in respect of the links with parents. Parents' views on the school are now exceptionally positive, with many taking the trouble to write in to praise the work of the school and the impact of recent improvements.

The recently reorganised school leadership team has begun to have an impact on raising standards. Standards have been broadly average and this represents satisfactory achievement. School leaders have a clear picture of the progress each pupil is making and this has identified where pupils are underachieving. The extra support put in place for these pupils helps them to catch up. Pupils with complex learning difficulties and those with statements of special educational needs are especially well supported and so make good progress. This is recognised by their parents, one of whom wrote, 'When I leave my daughter in the mornings, I know she will be having all her needs met'. Pupils' progress overall is satisfactory rather than good because targets and marking are not used consistently well to give them a clear enough idea of the precise steps they need to take in order to improve their work. Though there is already much good and some outstanding teaching, this is not the consistent picture across the school. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall because some teachers do not expect enough of their pupils. Although many lessons proceed at a cracking pace, with pupils getting a lot done in the time available, the pace of some lessons is more laboured, with some teachers failing to capitalise on their pupils' enthusiasm.

Pupils enjoy school, and especially the wide range of extra-curricular clubs on offer. They appreciate the good curriculum, which draws on visits, themed weeks and increasing use of ICT to help make learning fun. Sessions of Countdown in Year 6 classes at the start of the day, for example, make good use of interactive whiteboards to constructively tap into pupils' competitive spirit while helping to develop their mathematical agility.

Although school leaders have an optimistic view of the school's academic success, their appreciation of its many strengths and its areas for development are accurate and there is an effective drive for improvement. Leaders have not allowed the current major building works to disrupt pupils' learning. Their success in transforming the issues from the last inspection from weaknesses into strengths and in boosting progress for those who fall behind shows that the school has good capacity for further improvement.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that all teachers have high expectations of what their pupils can do so that pupils work at a good pace and get a lot done.
- Ensure that marking and pupils' individual targets are consistently and more widely used to help pupils to improve their work. A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Standards are broadly average. They are generally a little better in English. In the tests taken in 2006, standards dipped in science. However, measures taken this year to make the subject more interesting and exciting by giving much greater attention to investigations has resulted in a raising of standards in science in the current Year 6. Pupils join the school having attained average scores in the assessments taken when they were in Year 2. The standards reached in the Year 6 national tests mean that pupils' achievement is satisfactory. Many of the pupils with learning difficulties make especially good progress because they benefit from well-targeted support. This is particularly the case for those with more complex difficulties, including those with a statement of special educational needs.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils enjoy school, work diligently and are eager learners, particularly when challenged sufficiently. Pupils are especially enthusiastic about the extra-curricular activities. Attendance has improved markedly since the last inspection. It was previously poor but now it is a little above average. Behaviour is very good and the quality of relationships between pupils and with adults is a significant strength. Pupils show sensitivity to the needs of others. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Pupils have a clear sense of right and wrong because, as a parent observed, 'They are taught respect and good morals'. Pupils are developing a greater awareness of the diversity of cultures which define contemporary Britain.

Pupils are very aware of the need to keep fit and healthy because the school promotes their understanding of this well. They are proud that their boys' soccer team has proved itself the best in Sussex. Pupils feel very safe in school and have considerable confidence in the adults around them. They contribute well to the school community through the many posts of responsibility they hold in the school and to the wider community through participation in local events. Although standards in key literacy and numeracy skills are satisfactory, the confidence and self-assurance which pupils acquire equip them well for future life. As a parent commented, 'I am confident my children will leave with happy memories and will have developed into hard-working and caring individuals, ready for the next stage of their education'.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The good management of pupils' behaviour is matched by pupils' good attitudes to learning. Interactive whiteboards are used effectively to enliven lessons. Careful questioning by teachers

and opportunities for pupils to discuss and collaborate with 'talking partners' feature in most lessons and foster pupils' thinking, speaking and listening skills. These strong features of teaching were seen in an outstanding mathematics lesson in a Year 4 class where the rigorous questioning and discussion opportunities led to particularly good learning. Teaching assistants are deployed well to provide guidance and support for those who need it. Teachers have good subject knowledge and they always explain to pupils the lesson's purpose and expected outcomes. Occasionally, however, communication of the lesson's purpose needs more discussion in words that are familiar to youngsters.

Where individual lessons are satisfactory, the pace is pedestrian rather than brisk and pupils could be working harder. Teachers' expectations of what youngsters can achieve varies within and between year groups. Demands are not always high enough, so pupils make steadily satisfactory progress over time rather than good progress. The school is in the early stages of involving pupils in knowing what they need to do to improve their performance and how to judge the quality of their own work. There is too much variability across the school in the way marking is used to achieve this, so pupils are not always clear about what they need to do to improve.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Features contributing strongly to pupils' learning and personal development are the themed curriculum activities, such as 'brain awareness' week, where pupils explore how they learn. Projects for targeted groups, such as 'Mathemagicians' for some Year 5 pupils and one using film and drama to improve boys' writing, have lifted achievement. The techniques used in the latter have been taken up in other classes. ICT provision is much improved since the last inspection.

A great many pupils take up the wide range of clubs and after-school activities, and the school's participation in festivals broadens their arts horizons. They enjoy the opportunities they have to learn Spanish. Music is used to help motivate pupils in subjects such as physical education, though sometimes the choice of song conveys mixed messages. Happily, pupils do not subscribe to the 'we don't need no educashun' sentiments expressed in Pink Floyd's *The Wall*. The leadership team have identified that some subjects have not been taught imaginatively enough. For instance, it has discovered through auditing provision and responses to it that geography is considered a dull subject by both teachers and pupils. As a result, the school is in the process of revising the geography curriculum to make it more practical and appealing.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The school provides a very secure and happy learning environment which ensures that pupils feel safe and valued. Parents overwhelmingly describe their children as well cared for. Child protection procedures are robust. Good attention is given to pupils' health and safety. The school complies fully with current requirements for safeguarding children. Pupils with learning difficulties are supported particularly well, enabling many to make good progress in their learning. Liaison with outside agencies is effective in ensuring good quality support for these pupils.

The school has thorough systems for monitoring pupils' academic progress. These impact very positively on the progress which pupils with learning difficulties, in particular, make because

the school is effective in putting in place extra support when pupils are identified as falling behind. Although some pupils have individual targets, their use varies widely between different classes. Combined with the inconsistent marking, this means that not all pupils have a clear understanding of what they need to do to improve their work.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership is focused closely on the school vision for strong Christian values that manifest themselves in very good care for pupils, which is highly appreciated by parents. One parent commented that 'the headteacher always seems to find the right approach and appropriate tone'. The headteacher has been particularly focused on creating a positive ethos, but the shift to translate pupils' good attitudes into good achievement and standards has been relatively recent, following the reorganised leadership team. There has been a considerable amount of recent work by school leaders in tracking pupils' progress, auditing aspects of learning and canvassing views. This has led to accurate self-evaluation of what is needed to improve learning and lift standards. The school's detailed development plan has clear criteria by which success can be measured and is helping to drive improvement, but not all actions are as well prioritised as they could be. Subject leaders fulfil their brief well for checking on the quality of provision and pupils' standards. There are individual high quality examples of evaluative report writing to inform governors and staff of findings and of the next steps for improvement. The governing body carries out its duties well, gathering information in a range of ways, challenging the school in committee discussions and being closely involved in strategic planning.

Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
---	-----------------------

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
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The behaviour of learners	2
The attendance of learners	3
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
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

The quality of provision

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

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

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2
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	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Nicolas' Junior School, Portslade, Brighton BN41 2LA

Thank you all for making us so welcome and helping us when we visited your school.

We think the school is doing a sound job because you are making sound progress. The teaching is satisfactory overall, but there is quite a lot of good teaching and some that is outstanding. The lessons that are especially good are the ones where your teachers expect you all to work hard and get through a lot in the time available. We have asked the school to make sure that more of your lessons are like that.

We know that you and your parents are very proud of your school. We were particularly impressed by the way the headteacher and other school leaders help to make you feel safe and secure and keen to learn. It is good to see that the things that were not so good when your school was last inspected, like ICT, attendance and the way the school works with parents, are all now so very much better. The school provides lots of interesting things for you to do, and many of you told us how much you enjoy all the clubs.

The school looks after you well and we were especially pleased to see how very well behaved you are and how you all get on so well with each other. You are keen to succeed but not all of you know or make use of the personal targets that you have. We have suggested that the school give you more guidance through marking and targets so that you know exactly what you need to do to improve your work.

You can help too by making sure you know your targets and continuing to work hard and do your best.

Thank you again for being so helpful and friendly when we came to see you.

Yours faithfully Selwyn Ward Lead Inspector