

St Nicholas School

Address: Philpott Avenue, Southend-on-Sea, Essex, SS2 4RL

Unique reference number (URN): 144691

Inspection report: 20 January 2026

Exceptional	
Strong standard	●
Expected standard	● ● ● ● ●
Needs attention	
Urgent improvement	

✓ **Safeguarding standards met**

The safeguarding standards are met. This means that leaders and/or those responsible for governance and oversight fulfil their specific responsibilities and have established an open culture in which safeguarding is everyone's responsibility and concerns are actively identified, acted upon and managed. As a result, pupils are made safer and feel safe.

How we evaluate safeguarding

When we inspect schools for safeguarding, they can have the following outcomes:

- **Met:** The school has an open and positive culture of safeguarding. All legal requirements are met.
- **Not met:** The school has not created an open and positive culture of safeguarding. Not all legal requirements are met.

Strong standard

Attendance and behaviour

Strong standard 

Leaders' work to improve attendance has had a highly positive impact. Attendance is broadly in line with national averages for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and shows a clear trend of improvement in recent years.

This has been enabled by the highly personalised approach taken by the school. The school closely monitors pupils who have considerable difficulties in improving levels of attendance. Leaders, staff, parents and professionals work well together to identify barriers to attendance for these pupils and provide highly effective targeted support. This includes adapting provision for pupils, supporting with transport and maintaining regular contact with families. As a result, nearly all pupils who previously had low attendance now attend and engage consistently well in school.

Pupils' behaviour across the school is excellent. They are consistently calm, respectful and compassionate. Leaders have established a culture where bullying and discriminatory behaviour are not tolerated and rare. Pupils are enthusiastic, engaged learners who love to learn and work together.

Staff understand pupils' complex needs and apply behaviour policies with precision and skill. They support pupils' self-regulation and emotional management expertly. Relationships between pupils and staff are warm and supportive. This creates a safe, caring environment where pupils demonstrate excellent attitudes to learning and consideration for others.

Expected standard

Achievement

Expected standard 

Pupils progress steadily from their various starting points. The curriculum helps them to build the knowledge and skills they have missed in their earlier education. Consequently, pupils leave school having secured appropriate accreditations such as GCSEs, BTEC National Diploma full awards, entry level, functional skills and AQA awards.

Pupils develop a secure basis of knowledge in English and mathematics. They become accurate and fluent readers and use their phonics knowledge well to support with spelling and early writing. The school is ambitious to deepen pupils' knowledge further in these areas.

Pupils' personal development is a key part of their achievement. Often, they join the school not able to be part of a classroom or work among others. Due to the highly robust transition process and supportive culture that permeates the school, pupils personally blossom. Pupils leave the school ready for their next stage as motivated learners with the interaction skills to work effectively with others.

Curriculum and teaching

Expected standard 

The school has designed a well-matched and progressive curriculum that reflects the complexity of pupils' needs. Knowledge is organised and well sequenced through half-termly 'Quests' which support personalised outcomes for pupils across a common curriculum. This well-conceived approach enables pupils to access a broad and balanced curriculum that is refined in response to pupils' needs.

Staff use well-matched resources and texts to ensure that phonics is delivered with consistency. Pupils are well supported to become accurate and fluent readers.

Across subjects, teaching is typically effective. Staff have been well trained and consequently have secure subject knowledge. They understand how learning should be sequenced over time. Teachers know pupils well and adapt learning thoughtfully, making reasonable adjustments where needed. However, in some places, the activities that pupils are given do not allow them to deepen and extend their learning as much as they could.

The school approach to assessment is effective. Pupils' gaps in knowledge are identified through robust checks. Information from these checks is typically used effectively to help pupils address any gaps in knowledge, particularly when pupils are missing core skills in English or mathematics.

Inclusion

Expected standard 

Leaders have created a highly inclusive culture where pupils are well known by staff and have their special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) met effectively. Leaders ensure that pupils' needs are identified quickly and accurately through checks and observations when pupils arrive at school. Robust transition plans in Year 7 and close work with families and professionals aids this process.

Staff help pupils to overcome barriers to learning through effective classroom support. Therapeutic support from the school counsellor and emotional support team effectively targets pupils' well-being and mental health. Leaders are ambitious to further refine pupils' annual targets and the strategies that teachers use to provide even more precise support to pupils.

Staff have secure knowledge of the barriers that face pupils. They receive high quality and specialist training which they use well to provide the appropriate sensory and learning environments.

Pupil premium funding is used thoughtfully to address gaps in pupils' academic and personal development. The school makes effective use of additional external support, including alternative provision to successfully re-engage pupils with school.

Leaders carefully ensure that the right provision is in place for disadvantaged pupils, pupils with SEND and those known or previously known to children's social care. As a result, pupils feel safe, included and ready to learn.

Leadership and governance

Expected standard 

Pupils, parents and staff report high levels of satisfaction with the school. Parents are especially thankful and positive about the notable improvements that they recognise in their children's personal and social development, which has transformed their lives. Parents recognise the impactful and effective work of the school and value how well school leaders and governors interact with them.

Staff are extremely proud to work at this school. They value how respected and valued they are by leaders and governors. They know their professional contributions will be listened to and acted upon. Staff appreciate the high consideration leaders give to their well-being and workload. All staff receive high quality and evidence-informed training to meet pupils' diverse needs. This training underpins the consistently high-quality inclusion work that is seen through the school.

Leaders understand the school's strengths and areas for development. They work together well to identify what is and is not working effectively. They prioritise their work to make any improvements. They have successfully focused on getting the culture for behaviour, attendance and attitudes to learning right, which has had a notable impact on pupils' engagement and learning.

Governors and trustees are highly knowledgeable. They ensure that pupils are at the centre of all they do. They provide effective professional challenge and support while holding leaders to account. Leaders at all levels ensure that statutory duties are met and that all decisions are targeted towards meeting the needs of pupils.

Leaders have demonstrated their sustained focus on meeting pupils' specific needs. The work of the leadership team in recent years has created a secure and nurturing environment where pupils blossom academically and personally.

Personal development and wellbeing

Expected standard 

Leaders have established ambitious and well-planned curriculums for personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) and relationships and sex education. Through these, pupils gain secure knowledge of vital concepts such as healthy relationships and consent. Pupils are also encouraged to reflect on their beliefs and experiences while respecting and understanding the values and views of others. The knowledge that pupils gain about the wider world, including a range of cultures and traditions, prepares them well for life in modern Britain.

Life skills are woven through the 'Quest' curriculum model. Through curriculum enrichment activities and local trips, pupils develop effective social skills and learn to cooperate and resolve conflicts. Crucially, they learn how to be positive members of the local community. Leadership opportunities, such as school council roles and friendship ambassadors, further help pupils to share their voice and develop responsibility.

Pupils learn about difference and equality through various events and assemblies during the school year. These activities provide opportunities for pupils to celebrate diversity in all its forms. Pupils also engage with numerous experiences that match their talents and interests

and build their cultural awareness. This is supported through a wide range of clubs, trips, and residential visits.

Careers education is well integrated through the PSHE curriculum and taught to all pupils through the school. Employer visits and workshops enhance this experience for pupils. This is followed by a comprehensive work experience programme which prepares pupils in Year 11 for the world of work. Transition planning and preparation for adulthood are personalised to meet the individual needs of pupils well.

All adaptations are made to ensure all pupils can access the range of opportunities and experiences the school has on offer. As a result, pupils leave the school prepared for their next stage of education, employment or training. They develop the independence and self-confidence skills needed for future success.

What it's like to be a pupil at this school

Pupils benefit from being well known and understood by the staff who work with them. Expert staff get to know pupils quickly and this creates a warm and purposeful environment which is felt through the school. Pupils feel valued. They clearly trust the staff here. Pupils know that staff want the best for them, will help to keep them safe and help them to learn.

Pupils love to learn at this vibrant and inclusive school. They are positive about the curriculum and how much they enjoy it. Pupils understand that everyone has a right to learn. They behave well and actively support each other.

Pupils have a range of needs. The school makes rapid adjustments and adaptations to help pupils take part in school events. Across school trips, residential, on-site clubs and off-site competitions, all pupils are given the support to be fully included in all that the school offers.

Pupils are given the opportunities to learn vital leadership skills. Through roles such as school councillors, friendship ambassadors or planning campaigns and events, pupils learn what it means to positively contribute to society.

Pupils treat each other with compassion and kindness. They recognise that everyone is different. They respect and celebrate these differences. Consequently, unkind behaviour, including bullying, is very rare. When pupils do have concerns or problems, they are reassured that the staff will deal with them promptly and effectively.

The school is a calm and happy place, where pupils can focus on learning and feel secure. This is reflected in how well pupils attend school and the highly positive way that they engage with their learning and development.

Next steps

- Leaders should ensure the activities that pupils are given allow them to deepen and extend their learning across the entire curriculum.

- Leaders should ensure that strategies linked to pupils' special educational needs and/or disabilities are precisely matched to pupils annual targets and consistently adapted in order to remove barriers to learning more swiftly.
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About this inspection

Information about this inspection:

This school is part of the SEN Trust Southend, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer (CEO), Jackie Mullan, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Jane Oliver.

Inspectors carried out this full inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Following our renewed inspection framework, all inspections are now led by His Majesty's Inspectors (HMIs) or by Ofsted Inspectors (OIs) who have previously served as HMIs.

Inspectors spoke with the headteacher, other members of the senior leadership team, the CEO for the trust, the chair of trustees and the chair of governors, and two additional governors, during the inspection.

Information about this school:

St Nicholas School is a special educational needs school, which provides education for autistic pupils and pupils with moderate learning difficulties. All pupils who attend the school have an education, health and care plan.

The school makes use of one unregistered alternative provision.

Headteacher: Laura Fox

Lead inspector:

Nina Marabese, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspector:

Sara Boyce, His Majesty's Inspector

Facts and figures used on inspection

The data was used by the inspector(s) during the inspection. More recent data may have been published since the inspection took place.



This data is from 20 January 2026

School and pupil context

Total pupils

103

What does this mean?

The total number of pupils currently at this school and how this compares to other schools of this phase in England.

School capacity

108

What does this mean?

The total number of pupils who can attend the school and how this compares to other schools of this phase in England.

Pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM)

64.08%

What does this mean?

The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals at any point in the last six years.

Pupils with an education, health and care (EHC) plan

100.00%

What does this mean?

The proportion of pupils with an education, health and care plan. This covers pupils with more support than is available through special educational needs support.

Pupils with special educational needs (SEN) support

0.00%

What does this mean?

The proportion of pupils with reported special educational support needs at the school.

Location deprivation

Well above average

What does this mean?

Based on the English Indices of Deprivation (2019) and the school's location, we have calculated whether the school is located in a more or less deprived area.

Resourced Provision or SEND Unit (if applicable)

No resourced provision

What does this mean?

Whether school has Resourced Provision or SEND unit (if applicable).

Type of specialist provision (if applicable)

ASD - Autistic Spectrum Disorder, MLD - Moderate Learning Difficulty

What does this mean?

The type of Special Educational Needs provision provided at the school (if applicable).

Destinations after 16

Destinations after 16

Percentage of pupils staying in education or employment for at least 2 terms after the end of secondary school (key stage 4).

Year	This school
2023 leavers (provisional)	94%
2022 leavers (revised)	86%
2021 leavers (revised)	71%

Absence

Overall absence

The percentage of all possible mornings and afternoons missed due to absence from school (for whatever reason, whether authorised or unauthorised) across all pupils.

Year	This school
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2024/25 (2 term)	10.6%
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2023/24 (3 term)	13.8%
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2022/23 (3 term)	15.4%
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Persistent absence

The percentage of pupils missing 10% or more of their possible mornings and afternoons.

Year	This school
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2024/25 (2 term)	30.6%
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2023/24 (3 term)	34.7%
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2022/23 (3 term)	38.0%
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Our grades explained

Exceptional

Practice is exceptional: of the highest standard nationally. Other schools can learn from it.

Strong standard

The school reaches a strong standard. Leaders are working above the standard expected of them.

Expected standard

The school is fulfilling the expected standard of education and/or care. This means they are following the standard set out in statutory and non-statutory legislation and the professional standards expected of them.

Needs attention

The expected standards are not met but leaders are likely able to make the necessary improvements.

Urgent improvement ●

The school needs to make urgent improvements to provide the expected standard of education and/or care.

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) inspects services providing education and skills for children and learners of all ages, and inspects and regulates services that care for children and young people.

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