ST NICHOLAS SCHOOL

SEF 2026-2027

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St Nicholas School Self Evaluation 2026-2027

School Context

St Nicholas School is an oversubscribed primary school for pupils aged between 4 and 11 years old with Moderate to Severe Learning Needs, ASD and Communication Needs. There are 276 on roll (198 boys and 78 girls).
All children who attend the school have an Education, Health and Care Plans. The percentage of pupils eligible for Pupil Premium funding is 46.49% compared to 24.6% nationally. The school has links with The Magic Breakfast Charity who provide a range of free breakfast items to the school. All children are offered a breakfast and fruit during the day.
52.59 % have a diagnosis of Autism and 71.48% have a Speech, Language and Communication Diagnosis. Having recently expanded, the cohort of need has changed to include Severe Learning Needs and Complex Needs including challenging behaviour. The school, housed in a new four-story building since 2020, features 28 classrooms, a PE hall, dining hall, Music Room, Cooking Room, Soft play, library, a range of play spaces and specialist rooms such as a sensory room, an immersive sensory room and 3 calming rooms.
The school has recently developed a Pathway Model to accommodate the varying needs of the children
There are 5 pathways: Discovery (Reception), Explore (play and practical learning), Adventure (ASD and Communication), Investigate (Sensory and Communication) and Challenge (Formal). Further information can be found below.
In May 2024, the school had a Section 8 OFSTED inspection and was graded as Require Improvement in all areas. A monitoring visit was completed in October 2025 and this highlighted the progress that the school had made. Both reports can be found here: The full OFSTED report can be found here:
St Nicholas School - Open - Find an Inspection Report - Ofsted

School Improvement Priorities 2026-2029

The school has identified three key areas for strategic improvement over the next three years:
Strategy Driver 1: Positive Partnerships
Strategy Driver 2: Investment in People
Strategy Driver 3: Purposeful and Engaging Environments

Outcomes from Previous Data (2025/2026)

- A Professional culture is instilled in the workforce so that school improvement is more successful.
- Pathway Model has been implemented, including Pathway Specific curriculum documents, across the whole school and further embedding took place over the year so that children are engaged in learning that suits their learning styles
- Teachers followed Cycle A curriculum in 2026/2027 and will follow Cycle B 2027/2028 and will continue with alternative years after that.
- DHT monitored Evidence for Learning to ensure staff were uploading observations linked to clear lesson objectives and assessment framework and sharing 3 times a week with parents. This has increased to 5 times a week this academic year.
- Assessment Data demonstrated that most pupils made progress. Those children that did not make the identified steps of progress have been flagged for monitoring throughout the academic year via Pupil progress Meetings.
- English lead + Little Wandle Lead collected assessment data for phonics at the end of each term to analyse progress. Most children have made progress in phonics.
- Little Wandle Lead will continue to support and monitor the implementation of the Little Wandle SEND scheme with staff and ensure that all staff are delivering the scheme consistently, particularly focusing on moving children from Foundational Level of Little Wandle to Stage 1.
- HT, AHT + FLO monitored and analysed pupil attendance data monthly and supported parents with improving attendance for their child. Attendance for the end of year improved on the previous year and interventions taking place more quickly. Further support has been put in place for those pupils who specific barriers to attendance including home visits and short-term alternative placements.
- Maths, English and PSED lead reviewed their Scheme of Work to support staff with new curriculum and Pathway approach. A Life Skills Curriculum has been written. As well as an assessment framework for life and social skills.
- Teacher Mentor and Development lead supported new staff with on-going training and development. There are now 3 un-qualified teamers who will complete ITT within the next year, and 3 ECTs.
- Behaviour team monitored and analysed data from Behaviour Watch regarding incidences and reports. These demonstrated that the Behaviour approach was reducing behaviour incidences for a number of children.
- Communication team continued to support classes with communication within the classroom such as PECS, GRID, communication boards, Now and Next etc and their audit demonstrated that staff were more confident with this.
- The Therapy Team has been increased to include OT therapists who will support staff with sensory integration, sensory regulation, fine motor skills and effective toilet training.
- HT monitored communication between teachers and parents and ensure that parents are fully informed of learning that their child has done and that they are fully aware of any behaviour incidences their child has been involved in.
- Monitoring of Teaching and Learning continued through observations, Learning Walks and ad hoc class visits. Support was given to staff who needed it.

DISCOVERY PATHWAY

At St Nicholas School, our Early Years provision is our **Discovery Pathway**. All children in Reception join Discovery, regardless of their specific needs or diagnosis. This crucial baseline year allows us to deeply understand each child's unique learning profile, communication needs, sensory preferences, and social interaction style, which then informs their pathway placement as they progress through the school.

Discovery Pathway: Our Early Years Provision

Structure and staffing:

Discovery Pathway has:

- **9-10 children** in Reception (aged 4-5). The number of children depends on the in-take each year
- **1 qualified teacher** (Early Years specialist)
- **3 Teaching Assistants** (ratio of 1:3.3)
- **Access to specialist support:** Speech and Language Therapy therapists and assistants, Occupational Therapy therapists and assistant, behaviour support from the behaviour team

The higher adult-to-pupil ratio enables:

- Intensive observation and assessment of each child
- Individualised support for children with complex needs
- Responsive teaching that follows children's interests and needs
- Safe, nurturing environment where children can explore and learn
- Close partnership with parents during this crucial transition

Physical environment:

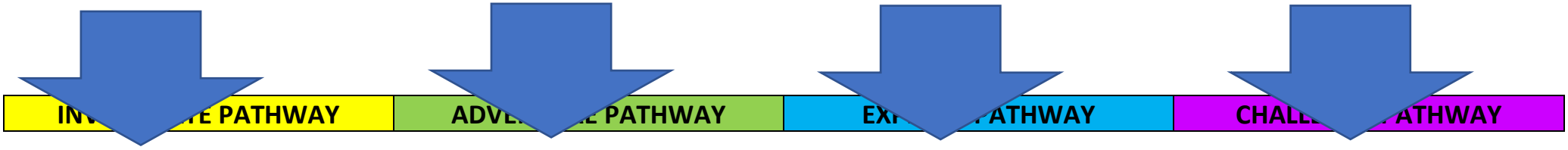
The Discovery classrooms and outdoor areas are carefully designed to meet the needs of our youngest learners:

Indoor environment:

- **Defined areas:** Role play area, construction area, creative area, sensory area, quiet area, mark-making area, maths area, book corner
- **Accessible resources:** Resources at child height with visual labels, enabling independence and choice
- **Sensory considerations:** Calm, uncluttered spaces with careful attention to lighting, noise levels, and visual stimuli
- **Visual supports:** Visual timetables, now/next boards, choice boards throughout the environment
- **Communication-rich:** Communication aids, PECS symbols, signing prompts, books and stories accessible

Outdoor environment:

- **Continuous provision:** Access to outdoor learning throughout the day
- **Physical development:** Climbing equipment, bikes and trikes, balancing equipment, ball games
- **Exploratory play:** Sand, water, mud kitchen, natural materials
- **Quiet spaces:** Areas for children who need calm, less stimulating outdoor time



Sensory/Complex and Communication	ASD and Communication	Play, Practical and Communication	Formal
Structure and Staffing: • **9-10 children depending on cohort** • **1 Teacher and 4 Teaching Assistants** **Teaching Approach:** Blended sensory and therapeutic approach (SaLT and OT). These are carefully sequenced to build tolerance and preferences. Staff provide a rich sensory environment e.g. range of activities in tuff trays using a range of sensory materials. High focus on communication through SaLT input and Sensory regulation through OT input. Learning is personalised to each pupil's profile and sensory developmental level. Staff use specialist rooms such as the Sensory Room and Sensory Integration Room to support children with their communication and emotional regulation. **Communication Support:** High ratio of adult support to support appropriate communication e.g. PECS, GRID, communication boards, visual timetables, Now and Next boards. Communication is taught through Intensive Interaction and responsive approaches. Staff ensure that pupils sensory needs are met so that they are able to engage in learning through activities such as Attention Autism, Intensive Interaction, Sensory Stories, Sensory Maths and Intensive Interaction. **Student Profile:** Pupils have complex learning needs. Pupils require a rich sensory environment in order to engage in their learning. Pupils most likely at an early developmental level. Early communication skills is a key priority for learning as most are non-verbal.	**Structure and Staffing:** • **9-10 children depending on cohort** • **1 Teacher and 4 Teaching Assistants** **Teaching Approach:** Holistic approach with specific ASD applied principles such as TEACCH. Curriculum and learning is taught through structure and routine with a predictable visual schedule. Pupils learn key life skills, especially based on communication, social skills and independence. Learning is broken into small steps with clear start and end points. Subjects are taught through structured work systems that enable independent working. **Support Strategies:** Staff ensure sensory needs are met through sensory integration and sensory diets and that children work in a low arousal environment. Staff engage children in lessons using activities such as Attention Autism, Intensive Interaction, Social Stories. Staff use a range of communication to support the children such as PECS, GRID, communication boards, Now and Next and other augmented approaches. Individual strategies have been further developed for the most challenging pupils e.g. Zones of Regulation or sensory integration strategies to reduce level of stimulation. **Student Profile:** Children have a range of learning needs such as SCLN or ASD. Pupils require a structured learning environment. Pupils work well on a TEACCH system with clear visual timetables and routines. Has communication that may be augmented using communication aids such as PECS, GRID, signing, communication boards etc.	**Structure and Staffing:** • **10-11 children depending on cohort** • **1 Teacher and 2 Teaching Assistants** **Teaching Approach:** Learning is child centred where activities are based on the interests of the pupils in order to engage them and to expand their communication and social skills that includes requesting. Commenting and simple conversation. Children apply and consolidate their learning through a range of play and practical activities that include functional, symbolic and cooperative play. Whole Class Teaching is taught through engaging activities such as Attention Autism, Sensory Stories and practical based learning. **Curriculum Delivery:** Most subjects taught through a cross-curricular approach although there are some discrete Maths and English lessons. Behaviour focuses on behaviour for learning, engaging children through effective communication and through social skills. **Student Profile:** Has some of our younger learners in this pathway. Older children have an SLD profile or are at the early developmental levels. Some older children may also present with SEMH needs and need support with appropriate play and social skills. Children need play/practical experiences to learn concepts and new skills as well as consolidating what has already been taught.	**Structure and Staffing:** • **10-11 children depending on cohort** • **1 Teacher and 2 Teaching Assistants** **Teaching Approach:** The curriculum follows a more traditional subject-based structure but adapted for pupils' learning needs. Holistic approach with a more formal structure of learning. Teacher led learning that includes subject specific lessons with cross curricula activities. Work completed either in small groups or independently. Children transfer their skills around the school and in the community. **Focus Areas:** Staff encourage pupils to apply independence skills in a wider range of situations. Curriculum extends and generalises skills. Staff also work on social and life skills as part of the curriculum. Subjects build cumulatively with regular retrieval practice. **Student Profile:** Pupils mostly have Moderate Learning difficulties or SCLN. Pupils have a reliable communication system. Older pupils can move independently around the school. Children can work in small groups or independently. Pupils are more independent in how to self-regulate. Pupils interact with peers and form friendships independently of adult modelling.

St Nicholas School Self Evaluation 2025-2026

Safeguarding

Evaluation: Met

The school has clear safeguarding procedures, staff are trained, and concerns are monitored effectively. The school also works closely with families and external agencies where necessary to ensure pupil safety.

STRENGTHS

- There are clear and robust safeguarding procedures in place. Safeguarding polices are regularly reviewed and updated and are accessible on the school website.
- Staff had a secure understanding of safeguarding issues including radicalisation, extremism and PREVENT. They are also clear on contextual safeguarding within the school.
- Knowledge of Safeguarding within the curriculum from staff is good including Online Safety, Stanger Danger, RSE and relationships. They are clear about where these are taught within the curriculum and how to adapt these to their cohort.
- The school works tirelessly with families to ensure that pupils are safe and that families feel supported
- MyConcern and Confide (logging for staff Low Level Concerns) are embedded in school practise and is closely monitored by DSLs
- The school has a good offer for LAC and children in kingship care/SGO
- There is an excellent counselling offer for children who have suffered trauma, who are Looked After or on a CP plan such as Drama Therapy, Play Therapy, Music Therapy. Children also have access to two ELSAs and a therapy dog in training.
- Children's communication is supported through the use of visual aids, communication boards, GRID and regular oracy opportunities so that children can communicate any safety concerns
- The school has a strong safeguarding team of 7 DSLs and 4 Attendance Team Members. Both teams meet regularly to discuss concerns raised and next steps.
- The school invites an external Safeguarding Company (Judicium) to conduct an annual Safeguarding audit. Recent audits have confirmed that safeguarding is **Good** within the school. This is completed alongside the annual LA Safeguarding audit.
- The school also has a very good relationship with social care and with the wider multi-disciplinary team in line with 'Working Together to Safeguard Children'.
- Ongoing training throughout the year ensure that staff are updated regularly about current trends and contextual information about the school and leaders can maintain the 'it could happen here' attitude.
- The school is open and transparent, and shares information appropriately with social workers, other professionals and families. Thorough investigations are conducted when there have been incidents and outcomes have been shared with relevant parties. Leaders and staff are reflective and consider lessons learnt and ensure recommendation are swiftly put in place to prevent incidences occurring.
- The school works closely with the CME (Children Missing in Education) and Missing Mondays Team to report those children who have not returned to school or have moved out of the borough
- Leaders know and fulfil the statutory requirements for Safeguarding. The SBM and Head Teacher regularly review the SCR. There are 3 members of staff who are safer recruitment trained.
- The conduct and behaviour of staff are appropriate. Staff are aware of the staff code of conduct and, as a staff body, have also contributed to a Staff Charter to embrace a Professional Working Culture. The school works closely with its HR support and with the LADO in managing any staff safeguarding concerns or allegations.
- Any parent concerns or complaints are investigated immediately by a senior leader and robust recommendations are acted upon.
- The safeguarding governor is very aware of school practise and has termly visits from which reports are created and shared with the wider governing body.
- The school's premises team also ensure that the internal and external environment is safe and any issues are rectified swiftly.

Leaders ensure that staff's work is monitored and that they get appropriate supervision and support. Safeguarding is covered throughout the year through regular training and updates, including:

- **Updates on Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE)** - ensuring all staff understand their statutory responsibilities
- **Reporting concerns** - maintaining staff confidence and competence in identifying and escalating safeguarding issues
- **PREVENT** - understanding and responding to risks of radicalisation and extremism

This ongoing focus ensures that safeguarding remains at the forefront of everyone's practice and that staff knowledge is kept current.

AREAS OF DEVELOPMENT

- Create a Safeguarding Curriculum Map for the website
- Further establish regular and frequent safeguarding team meetings where open cases can be triaged and allocated to DDSLs
- Continue to regularly review safeguarding records ensuring these are up to date and include a summary of the concern, a record of actions taken (including correspondence with external agencies) and minutes/notes taken by the school

Inclusion

Evaluation: Expected Standard
The school identifies pupil needs and provides support, including therapeutic provision. However, progress in core subjects is inconsistent, indicating a need for further refinement of inclusive practices.

St Nicholas School is a special school serving 276 pupils, all of whom have Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs). The school has developed an innovative **Pathway Model** that recognises pupils' diverse learning needs and provides tailored pedagogical approaches rather than a one-size-fits-all system.

The Pathway Model

The school's distinctive approach centres on matching teaching methods to individual learning styles through four pathways: Discovery, Explore, Adventure, Investigate, and Challenge. This model:

- Sets high expectations based on individual learning profiles, not diagnoses
- Removes barriers by aligning teaching approaches with preferred learning styles
- Enables progress from individual starting points, regardless of complexity

The Pathway Model has enabled us to:

- Reduce barriers to learning by matching pedagogy to learning style rather than expecting all pupils to access the same teaching approach
- Improve engagement as evidenced by Behaviour Watch data and from Monitoring of Teaching and Learning records
- Enable progress for pupils with the most complex needs who previously struggles to access learning
- Deploy staff expertise effectively, with teachers and TAs developing specialist skills within their pathway
- Provie appropriate challenge for all pupils, from those with complex and severe needs to those with moderate learning needs.

Assessment and Planning Process: The Discovery Pathway serves as a baseline year where staff observe each child to identify their communication needs, sensory profile, social interaction preferences, and responses to different teaching approaches. Leaders then collaborate with teachers, therapists, the Behaviour Team, and parents to determine the most appropriate pathway, with annual reviews ensuring continued suitability.

Integrated Support Services

Therapy Team: The school has significantly expanded its therapy provision with 2 Speech and Language Therapists, 3 SaLT assistants, 2 Occupational Therapists, and an OT assistant. Therapists adapt their approaches to each pathway—for example, using play-based experiences in Explore, structured sessions in Adventure, and functional communication like smiLE therapy in Challenge.

Behaviour and Emotional Support: Two Behaviour Leads and a support assistant provide proactive strategies. Additional Pupil Premium funding supports Music Therapy, Drama Therapy, Play Therapy, and a Family Liaison Officer. Two Teaching Assistants work as ELSAs (Emotional Literacy Support Assistants), and the school has a Therapy Dog. Dedicated intervention sessions support Looked After Children.

Emotional Regulation: Pupils access Sensory Circuits throughout the day, sensory integration equipment, and the Zones of Regulation framework. Staff receive regular wellbeing and mental health training, enabling them to recognise and respond to emotional needs effectively. Our staff receive regular training in wellbeing and mental health, enabling them to recognise and respond effectively to pupils' emotional needs. We access specialist services including Seeability; Visual and Audio Teachers; The Evalina; Tulip Behaviour Services; Health Services including the special school nursing team and Paediatrician; and the Educational Psychology Team, to ensure pupils receive expert intervention when required. These services are also signposted to our parents and some come in to deliver training or coffee morning sessions. We recognise the importance of supporting our staff's wellbeing to ensure they can provide the best possible care for our pupils. We acknowledge and celebrate neurodivergent members of staff, creating an inclusive working environment that values diversity.

Our pupils benefit from:

- Access to Magic Breakfast, ensuring all children start the day ready to learn
- Health services including toothbrushing programmes and hearing support
- Regular access to therapy and specialist provision as outlined in EHCPs

Communication and Voice

The school prioritises communication through GRID, communication boards, Makaton, and PECS, with regular staff training from the Therapy Team. A School Council ensures pupils' and parents' views inform decisions about support. Oracy has been a key focus, with regular classroom opportunities for pupils to develop their communication skills.

Enrichment and Inclusion

All pupils access a rich programme including:

- Community trips developing life skills
- Pathway clubs promoting social development
- Swimming as part of physical development
- Participation in Croydon-wide events (choir performances, Palace4Life activities)
- PSED and Life Skills programmes
- Work experience for secondary pupils and internal opportunities (fruit delivery, PE buddies) for Years 5-6

Reasonable adjustments ensure full participation for all pupils in extra-curricular activities.

Partnership Working

The school maintains close relationships with parents, the Local Authority, and other SEN schools, sharing best practice. Regular meetings between SLT, teachers, and external professionals ensure coordinated support. The school provides an OUTREACH service to support SEN learners in other schools and rigorously follows the SEND Code of Practice.

Environment

Physical Environment: The school has designed its environment to meet diverse needs with a Sensory Room, Sensory Immersive Room, soft play, sensory circuits space, playground, trim trail, and MUGA, alongside adapted resources and accessible facilities.

AREAS FOR DEVELOPMENT

Strategy Driver 1: Positive Partnerships

Continued drive to improve the student's presence in the wider community through educational visits and community trips, increased visitors in school; links with local community facilities and further developing pupil voice.

Develop specific assessment frameworks to better capture progress such as PSED and communication framework

Continue to refine pathway criteria and transition process

Monitor progress in core subjects as this varies across Key Stages and Pathways due to the development profile of pupils particularly communication and social needs.

Strategy Driver 3: Purposeful and Engaging Environments

Adapting all areas to meet the changing cohort of the school evidenced by implementing whole school expectations of what a classroom and beyond looks like when learning.

Purposeful engagement and learning in all areas of the school evidences by prompt sheets and communication boards in all learning areas; staff knowledge and understanding of classroom climate and being responsive to this; staff active in capturing learning beyond the classroom.

Curriculum and Teaching

Evaluation: Expected Standard

The school has implemented a broad and balanced curriculum with adaptations for SEN, and a Pathway Model. However, inconsistent progress in core subjects suggests a need for further refinement of teaching strategies.

Curriculum Design and the Pathway Model

St Nicholas School has developed a sophisticated **five-pathway curriculum model** that recognises different groups of pupils with SEND learn most effectively through distinct pedagogical approaches. Rather than a one-size-fits-all curriculum, each pathway has its own curriculum intent, implementation, and assessment framework.

The curriculum documents break down objectives and activities by pathway, including appropriate language and vocabulary. These are regularly quality assured by teachers and the Middle Leadership Team (MLT) in collaboration with the Therapy Team. The curriculum identifies teaching approaches, children's interests, and essential knowledge while ensuring life experiences aren't limited. It links effectively with Evidence for Learning, enabling staff to connect activities and observations with relevant frameworks.

Quality Assurance: Leaders monitor curriculum delivery through pathway-specific learning walks, moderation within and across pathways, termly pupil progress meetings analysing whether teaching approaches enable progress, and regular reviews of pathway placements.

Staffing and Professional Development

Staff are deployed strategically with varying ratios by pathway: Discovery (1:3.3), Explore (1:3.3), Adventure (1:2), Investigate (1:2), and Challenge (1:4.5). Higher ratios in Adventure and Investigate reflect the intensive support needs of pupils with autism and complex needs. Teachers develop specialist expertise through targeted CPD. The Training and Development plan focuses on Pathways, Communication, and Occupational Therapy, with future training planned for subject-specific work, pedagogy, and high-quality teaching.

Foundations: Communication, Literacy, and Numeracy

St Nicholas School ensures that its curriculum and teaching approaches secure strong foundations for all pupils. The curriculum prioritises accurate and fluent word reading, spelling, handwriting and mathematics:

Across all pathways, we prioritise communication and early literacy/numeracy as foundations for all learning**:**

Communication: Communication is prioritised across all pathways using strategies including signing, PECS, Colourful Semantics, and visual/session timetables. Each pupil has an individualised communication system matched to their developmental level. Staff receive oracy training with clear expectations, and Oracy/Communication Groups occur at least weekly for 30-45 minutes per pathway. The school values that pupils use their voice in various ways—verbally, through communication boards, GRID, or signing.

Reading and Phonics: Reading for Pleasure and Reading across the Curriculum follows clear progression from pre-reading skills (attention to books, picture understanding, cause-and-effect) to decodable books and comprehension. In Discovery and Investigate, children 'read' through retelling using pictures, story maps, puppets, or props. In Adventure, Explore, and Challenge, guided reading books match appropriate phonics phases.

The school has adopted **Little Wandle**, a phonics scheme specifically for children with SEND, which has significantly improved phonics teaching. Focused phonics sessions occur at least three times weekly and are available on GRID and communication boards. Children are assessed termly, with books provided according to their phonics level. Key Stage 2 pupils receive spellings based on phonetical knowledge and learn sight words following the Little Wandle Progression Map. Upon completing Phase 5, pupils work on fluency and comprehension through Accelerated Reader and MyOn programmes.

Colourful Semantics is used throughout the curriculum in conjunction with the therapy team, with all classes displaying SVO (Subject-Verb-Object) and some Key Stage 2 classes extending to SVOPT. It's available on GRID and communication boards.

Writing: In Discovery and Investigate, handwriting is taught using Handwriting Without Tears (HWT) through multi-sensory activities including MatMan, wooden pieces, playdough with letter cards, and chalkboards. Activities like Pen and Dough Disco and Squiggle Wiggle complement OT work on fine motor skills.
In Adventure, Explore, and Challenge, pupils developing fine and gross motor skills continue with HWT, progressing to writing over dotted lines, shadow writing, drawing around templates, and writing in various media. Scaffolds support sentence writing, with progression from SV to SVOPT sentences. Pupils experience various writing genres including poems, newsletters, labels, instructions, recounts, fact files, and biographies. Key Stage 2 pupils learn spelling, punctuation, and grammar linked to their developmental level.
Mathematics: St Nicholas school ensures that mathematics teaching secures strong foundations for all pupils, with provision adapted to individual developmental levels across Discovery, Investigate, Adventure, Explore and Challenge pathways.
Across all pathways, early numeracy is prioritised alongside communication. Pupils develop number, counting, quantity, shape, space, measure, patterns and problem-solving through practical, multisensory and highly structured activities. Concrete resources, visual supports, symbols, signing, communication boards and GRID are used to ensure that all pupils can access learning and demonstrate their mathematical understanding.
In Discovery and Investigate, pupils develop early mathematical concepts through play, songs, sensory experiences and everyday routines. They develop skills such as matching, sorting, counting, recognising quantities, comparing objects and exploring shape, space and measure. Mathematical vocabulary is explicitly taught and reinforced throughout the school day.
In Adventure, Explore and Challenge, pupils build on these foundations through a progressive curriculum. They develop calculation skills, including addition, subtraction, multiplication and division, alongside number fluency, shape, measure, money, time, patterns and problem-solving. Concrete and pictorial resources are used to develop conceptual understanding before pupils' progress towards more abstract representations where appropriate.
Mathematics is embedded across the wider curriculum and in functional, real-life contexts such as cooking, shopping, timetables, money, measuring and daily routines. This supports pupils to generalise mathematical skills and develop greater independence.
Assessment is used to identify individual starting points and next steps. Pupils are given regular opportunities to revisit, consolidate and apply learning. Progress is evidenced through practical activities, observation, questioning and recorded work, recognising the different ways pupils communicate and demonstrate their mathematical understanding.
The school's approach prioritises secure foundations, functional application, communication, independence and appropriate progression, ensuring that pupils are supported and challenged according to their individual needs.

Evidence-Based Teaching Approaches
The Pathway Model itself functions as a barrier-removal strategy by matching pupils to appropriate pedagogical approaches:

- **Explore:** Play and practical-based learning balancing child-initiated play with structured adult-guided activities
- **Adventure:** Structured teaching (TEACCH), visual supports, and individualised plans for pupils with autism
- **Investigate:** Sensory integration and intensive interaction for pupils with severe learning difficulties and complex needs
- **Challenge:** Explicit instruction with rigorous subject-specific knowledge and functional life skills

Teachers develop specialist expertise in pathway pedagogy and work collaboratively in year groups for medium-term planning, completing weekly plans adapted to their classes. The CPD programme supports all staff with skills and knowledge for various strategies and interventions.
Assessment and Intervention
The school prioritises 'keeping up' rather than 'catching up' through:

- Higher support levels in Discovery, Investigate, and Adventure allowing individualised task planning
- Daily interventions built into the timetable
- Assessment data demonstrating most pupils make progress, with those not meeting identified steps flagged for monitoring each term

Teachers check understanding systematically, though this looks different across pathways: intensive interaction and sensory activities in Investigate; attention-building activities like Attention Autism in Adventure and Explore; visual supports and structured questioning in Adventure; and scaffolded questioning and written/verbal responses in Challenge.
A **Life Skills Curriculum** has been developed alongside an assessment framework for life and social skills, ensuring all pupils gain knowledge needed for later life. Pupils can transition between pathways as needs change, ensuring they always access the most appropriate curriculum.

AREAS FOR DEVELOPMENT
Strategy Driver 2: Investment in People
Targeted Professional Development to Improve Teaching and Learning through supporting staff to have greater confidence in identifying and teaching the essential mathematical foundations needed by pupils with SEND.
Continue monitoring the Teaching and Learning of the curriculum and use of new curriculum documents.
To monitor the progress of all children as progress varies in core subjects. This is related to the development profile of pupils particularly communication and social needs.
Strategy Driver 3: Purposeful and Engaging Environments
Adapting all areas to meet the changing cohort of the school evidenced by implementing whole school expectations of what a classroom and beyond looks like when learning.
Purposeful engagement and learning in all areas of the school evidences by prompt sheets and communication boards in all learning areas; staff knowledge and understanding of classroom climate and being responsive to this; staff active in capturing learning beyond the classroom.

Achievement

Evaluation: Expected Standard

Pupils are ready for the next stage of their education, have appropriate knowledge and skills across the curriculum reflected in their work, and develop good foundational knowledge and skills.

Pupil Context and Starting Points

St Nicholas School serves 276 pupils, all of whom have Education, Health and Care Plans with Moderate to Severe Learning Needs, ASD and Communication Needs. 52.59 % have a diagnosis of Autism and 71.48% have a Speech, Language and Communication Diagnosis Pupils start from significantly low baselines, often with minimal or no verbal communication, limited independence skills, and complex barriers to learning. Despite these challenging starting points, most pupils make good progress across the curriculum, developing the knowledge, skills and personal qualities needed for their next stage of education and adult life.

Readiness for Next Stage

Pupils leave St Nicholas School in Year 6 with strong foundations in:

- **Communication skills** by achieving maximum, individual potential by using their preferred method of communication to indicate their wants and needs
- **Literacy and numeracy foundations** by achieving maximum, individual potential to be able to participate in and access school life and the wider community corresponding to their personalised developmental level
- **Independence and life skills** by achieving maximum, individual potential to be able to participate in and access school life and the wider community corresponding to their personalised developmental level

The curriculum embeds a strong grounding in communication and functional skills within teaching, learning, and daily experiences, ensuring pupils are prepared for their next educational stage.

Knowledge and Skills Development by Pathway

Learning walks and monitoring visits demonstrate high-quality work across all pathways, with work appropriately adapted to pupils' developmental levels while maintaining high expectations:

Discovery Pathway (Reception): Pupils develop early communication through play-based activities, begin engaging with adult-led activities for increasing periods, and develop early mark-making and number recognition.

Explore Pathway (Play and Practical-based learning): Pupils produce work through exploratory, hands-on experiences using play and manipulatives. They demonstrate understanding through practical activities (sorting, matching, simple sequences) and develop communication from single words to simple phrases using GRID, communication boards, and visuals.

Adventure Pathway (ASD and communication): Pupils complete structured tasks independently using TEACCH work systems, demonstrate phonics knowledge through Little Wandle SEND activities, produce written work using visual supports and structured learning, and apply mathematical concepts using concrete resources and visual representations.

Investigate Pathway (Sensory/Complex needs and communication): Pupils engage with sensory experiences demonstrating preferences through engagement, communicate responses through GRID, communication boards, symbols and Makaton, and participate in intensive interaction and sensory activities.

Challenge Pathway (Formal curriculum): Pupils produce written work across subjects showing developing literacy skills using scaffolded sentences and Colourful Semantics, complete mathematical calculations with increasing accuracy using manipulatives, access Accelerated Reading demonstrating comprehension, and present work in science, humanities, and creative subjects.

Foundational Knowledge and Skills

Through the Pathway Model, pupils develop developmentally appropriate foundational knowledge and skills in:

- **Language and communication skills**
- **Accurate and fluent reading** (early reading, systematic phonics, reading fluency and comprehension)
- **Compositional skills, spelling and handwriting** (early mark-making, emergent writing, handwriting)
- **Mathematical knowledge** (early number concepts, number facts and calculation, mathematical reasoning)

Assessment Data and Progress

2025-2026 Academic Year Progress:

- **Assessment Data:** 88% of pupils made progress against personalised targets. Pupils not meeting identified steps of progress were flagged for monitoring through Pupil Progress Meetings and appropriate interventions were implemented
- **Phonics Progress:** Children made progress within the Little Wandle SEND programme
- **Communication Progress:** Most pupils reached their termly target for Speech and Language as evidenced from Communication Groups and observations
- **EHCP Outcomes:** Pupil Learning Goals (Pupil Passports) have been added to Evidence for Learning to support gathering evidence and progress data. Our fist monitoring cycle for checking progress is November 2026

Assessment Framework and Moderation

At the end of each term, teachers assess Number, Geometry, Reading, and Writing using bespoke Assessment banding on Evidence for Learning. The Assessment Lead meets with teachers to discuss individual progress, and information is shared with all school leaders. Data is shared with governors in termly Assessment Reports.

End of Key Stage Assessment:

- **Reception:** Pupils are assessed using Developmental Matters

- **Key Stage 1 and 2:** Pupils are assessed using Pre-Key Stage Standards or the Engagement Model
- **Moderation:** Internal moderation occurs regularly on Teacher Assessments using the Assessment Framework on Evidence for Learning and Pre-Key Stage Standards. The school also attends external moderation sessions with the Local Authority and the Special School Learning Partnership (SLP) in South London
- **National Assessments:** Where appropriate, children are entered for the Reception baseline, Year 1 phonics, and Year 6 SATs

Year 6 SATs: Two Year 6 children were eligible for SATs in 2025-2026. Both children completed the Mats SAT and although they did not reach the Expected Standard, they demonstrated good knowledge of arithmetic. Children have been identified through pupil progress meetings who would potentially be able to sit them in future years, and targeted interventions have been established for these students.

Vulnerable Groups

Data demonstrates that children in vulnerable groups make the same progress as their peers. Vulnerable groups include:

- Pupil Premium pupils
- Children in Special Guardianship or who are Looked After
- Children who are or have been on a Child in Need (CiN) or Child Protection (CP) plan
- Children with a sibling in school with SEND
- Out of Borough (OOB) children
- Children with EAL
- Children who are NRPF, living in temporary accommodation or whose social care needs do not meet threshold (we do not report on children's achievement with this)
- Children with Medical Needs (we do not report on children's achievement with this)

This equitable progress demonstrates the school's commitment to providing high-quality education for all pupils regardless of their circumstances or additional needs, ensuring that disadvantaged pupils, those with SEND, pupils known or previously known to children's social care, and those facing other barriers make suitable progress from their starting points and develop appropriate knowledge and skills to enable them to progress to the next stage.

Areas for Development

Strategy Driver 2: Investment in People

To develop the use of PLGs to monitor and track progress against EHCP outcomes

To develop assessment further to include PSED for all learners

To support EYFS teachers with using the schools own Assessment Bands rather than Development Matters.

Strategy Driver 3: Purposeful and Engaging Environments

Purposeful engagement and learning in all areas of the school evidences by prompt sheets and communication boards in all learning areas; staff knowledge and understanding of classroom climate and being responsive to this; staff active in capturing learning beyond the classroom.

Attendance and Behaviour

Evaluation: Expected Standard

The school promotes a positive culture and manages behaviour effectively. Pupils generally behave well and show positive attitudes to their learning.

Behaviour Culture and Philosophy

St Nicholas School has developed a culture of belonging where every child is valued, understood, and supported to engage positively in their learning. The school's approach is founded on the fundamental understanding that **behaviour is communication**, particularly for non-verbal pupils who cannot express their needs, anxieties, pain, or discomfort through words.

PROACT-SCIPr-UK Framework: The school adopts PROACT-SCIPr-UK, a system focusing on improving quality of life and helping individuals maintain self-control. This framework enables staff working with pupils with learning difficulties and behaviours of distress to engage in proactive methods of positive behaviour support. It emphasises a proactive rather than reactive approach and integrates entirely with individualised person-centred planning and visual communication.

The school recognises that pupils' challenging behaviours are not wilful or manipulative, but are their way of communicating unmet needs, sensory overload, anxiety, confusion, frustration, or distress. The school's role is to understand what the behaviour is communicating and respond therapeutically, teaching alternative ways to communicate and meet needs.

Core Values and Ethos

Central to the school's ethos is the belief that each human being is of equal value and deserving of respect. The school actively challenges stereotyped notions about developmental disabilities, maintaining positive expectations for all pupils while learning to perceive and understand their individual thoughts, feelings, wants, and needs. Through strong home-school partnerships and respect for cultural differences and property, each pupil receives quality services and the best efforts from staff.

Evidence of Positive Behaviour Culture

Learning walks consistently demonstrate:

- **Engagement:** Pupils engaged in activities appropriate to their pathway and developmental level, demonstrating positive learning behaviours including attention, persistence, cooperation, and turn-taking
- **Transitions:** Pupils transition calmly between activities with appropriate support and visual cues, with minimal disruption to learning across all pathways
- **Relationships:** Strong, trusting relationships between pupils and staff are evident—pupils seek comfort when distressed, share achievements, and show affection and connection to their key workers and class teams
- **Staff Knowledge:** Staff know pupils deeply, understanding their preferences, triggers, communication styles, and what makes them happy
- **Peer Interactions:** Pupils interact positively with peers at levels appropriate to their development, from parallel play through to cooperative play and friendships
- **Pupil Voice:** Pupils express happiness about school through their individual communication systems (verbal, PECS, body language) and are empowered to communicate when they need a break, sensory support, or help

Proactive Strategies and Support

Sensory Regulation: The school makes reasonable adjustments and adaptations while maintaining high expectations. Sensory diets and regulation strategies help pupils manage their behaviour and learning. Children access Sensory Circuits and Magic Breakfast each morning, enabling better engagement throughout the day. Two OT Therapists offer specialist expertise to staff and parents, and whole-staff training ensures consistent implementation of sensory regulation strategies.

Multi-Agency Collaboration: The school collaborates with CAMHS, Tulip, and Educational Psychology to support children whose behaviour requires additional specialist input.

Behaviour Team: The Behaviour Team has been expanded to include a behaviour support assistant who provides proactive and positive strategies to support children's full engagement in learning. Behaviour Champions are being developed to support crisis behaviour when it occurs, enabling the Behaviour Team to continue with more proactive support within classrooms and with families.

Zones of Regulation: Used across the school, Zones of Regulation have been successful in allowing children and staff to discuss their emotions and ways to regulate them. Staff model calm, positive interactions throughout the school day.

Behaviour Monitoring: The school uses Behaviour Watch to record incidents of behaviour, and data has demonstrated a reduction in incidents over time.

Attendance

Attendance Culture: St Nicholas School has created a culture where pupils feel safe, valued, and supported. The approach to attendance is rooted in understanding that pupils' complex needs require individualised, proactive strategies.

Attendance Data: Attendance has improved significantly between 2023-2024 and was maintained in 2025/2026:

Whole School Attendance 23/24	Whole School Attendance 24/25	Improvement
88.49%		+2.54%
Whole School Attendance 24/25	**Whole School Attendance 25/26**	**Difference**
91.03%	90.58%	-0.45%
Persistence Absence 23/24	**Persistence Absence 24/25**	**Improvement**
38.92%	34.53%	+4.39%
Persistence Absence 24/25	**Persistence Absence 25/26**	**Improvement**
34.53%	31.2%	+3.33%

The school's attendance of 90.58% exceeds the national average for special schools (approximately 90%).

Attendance Monitoring System

Attendance is monitored rigorously at all levels to ensure early intervention and sustained improvement:

Daily Monitoring:

- First-day response contact with families
- Immediate recording on Arbor
- Patterns monitored for particular days of the week or following incidents

Weekly Monitoring:

- Identifies emerging patterns
- Class teachers informed of pupils requiring additional support

Monthly Monitoring:

- Headteacher, Assistant Headteacher (DSL), and Family Liaison Officer analyse attendance data
- Identifies patterns, trends, and pupils causing concern
- Detailed analysis comparing data to previous months and the same period in the previous year
- Reviews impact of interventions
- Escalates concerns where necessary
- Celebrates improved attendance

Termly Monitoring:

- Comprehensive attendance data shared with governors
- Trends analysed by year group, pathway, and pupil characteristics including Pupil Premium, looked-after children, SEND type, and medical needs

This multi-layered monitoring system enables quick intervention when attendance becomes a concern, targeted support, and evaluation of strategy impact.

Family Liaison Officer Role

The Family Liaison Officer (FLO) plays a crucial role in supporting attendance by:

- Acting as a bridge between school and families
- Building trusting relationships
- Providing practical and emotional support to overcome barriers
- Acting as the first point of contact for families experiencing attendance difficulties
- Conducting home visits to understand family circumstances and identify practical barriers (transport, uniform, equipment, breakfast needs)
- Signposting families to external support services (housing, benefits, mental health services, domestic abuse services, food banks)
- Providing practical support through Magic Breakfast provision and community cupboard
- Working closely with multi-agency partners (CAMHS, Tulip, Educational Psychology)
- Making Early Help referrals where appropriate
- Taking a non-judgmental approach
- Attending multi-agency meetings to advocate for families
- Delivering attendance workshops at coffee mornings
- Celebrating attendance improvements
- Conducting weekly attendance monitoring and action plan reviews

This holistic approach ensures that interventions are timely, well-targeted, and responsive to changing family circumstances, enabling pupils to overcome barriers and attend school regularly.

AREAS FOR DEVELOPMENT

Strategy Driver 2: Investment in People

Developed strategies to improve workload and wellbeing of staff evidences by implementing a clarified procedure for reflection after behaviour incidents.

Trauma Informed: To support with the early implementation of a Trauma Informed Approach by focusing on our Meet and Greet and End and Send routines.

To begin to develop a Behaviour Forum to support staff with strategies and to the implementation of a Supervision Model

Strategy Driver 3: Purposeful and Engaging Environments

Purposeful engagement and learning in all areas of the school evidences by prompt sheets and communication boards in all learning areas; staff knowledge and understanding of classroom climate and being responsive to this; staff active in capturing learning beyond the classroom.

To increase the range of case studies demonstrating interventions and progress for Attendance and Behaviour

To develop the work of the FLO to support with early identification of persistent absence

Personal Development and Well-being

Evaluation: Expected Standard

The school provides a coherent personal development programme, promotes independence, and offers effective pastoral support, contributing to pupil's wellbeing.

Vision and Approach

St Nicholas School recognises that pupils' Personal Development and Wellbeing are intrinsically linked to their ability to learn and thrive. For pupils with SEND, developing independence, emotional regulation, social skills, and a sense of belonging are as important as academic achievement. **PSED is currently a key priority within the school's improvement journey**, with leaders establishing a clear vision centred on developing independence, communication, life skills, and preparation for adulthood following a previous 'Requires Improvement' judgement. Staff have fully embraced this direction, resulting in increasingly consistent practice and improved pupil engagement.

The school provides a rich, holistic curriculum that develops the whole child, preparing them not just for the next stage of education, but for fulfilling adult lives. This approach is underpinned by a **culture of belonging**—every child is valued, their views are heard, and they are supported to develop their unique strengths and interests.

PSHE and RSHE Curriculum

The school has established a coherent programme of personal development extending across the taught curriculum and wider opportunities, enabling pupils to develop spiritually, morally, socially, and culturally. The PSHE and RSHE curriculum meets statutory requirements whilst being fully adapted to meet the complex and diverse needs of pupils with SEND.

Key Principles:

- Meaningful engagement with pupils to ensure relevance
- Transparency with parents about all materials used

- Positivity in building healthy attitudes and skills
- Careful sequencing to equip pupils with knowledge before experiences occur
- Skilled delivery by staff trained in safeguarding and creating safe, supportive environments

The school has an up-to-date written RSHE policy developed through proactive engagement and consultation with parents, ensuring they understand that effective RSHE promotes and protects the wellbeing of all children. All curriculum materials are available for parents to view on request.

PSHE Curriculum Content

The curriculum is carefully sequenced across all pathways, organised into key thematic areas:

Self-Care Skills: Explicitly taught and practised, including toileting routines, personal hygiene (handwashing, teeth brushing, bathing), dressing and undressing independently, and understanding puberty and physical changes. Content is delivered in developmentally appropriate ways using visual supports, modelling, and repeated practice within functional contexts, including the dedicated Life Skills Room.

Making Choices and Understanding Right from Wrong: Embedded throughout the curriculum, pupils learn to express preferences, make decisions, understand consequences of behaviour and actions, and recognise legal and social boundaries. Teaching includes stranger danger, recognising trusted adults, and when and how to seek help.

Social Skills Development: Prioritised across all pathways with explicit teaching of turn-taking, sharing, initiating and maintaining friendships, understanding and pursuing special interests appropriately, and interpreting social situations. Staff model and scaffold social interactions using visual supports and social stories.

Community Skills: Prepares pupils for active participation in society, including learning about people who help us (emergency services, healthcare workers, teachers), using money safely, understanding different jobs and roles, using public transport including Oyster cards, and road safety. Skills are taught through direct instruction and reinforced through educational visits and real-world experiences.

Emotional and Sensory Regulation: A cornerstone of the curriculum, recognising that pupils need to understand and manage emotions to access learning and build positive relationships. Pupils learn about the range and scale of emotions (happiness, sadness, anger, fear, surprise, nervousness) and understand that worrying and feeling down are normal. The **Zones of Regulation framework** helps pupils recognise feelings, use varied vocabulary to talk about their own and others' feelings, and develop regulation strategies and toolkits. Pupils are explicitly taught how to seek help from trusted adults.

Life Skills: Taught progressively to develop independence and preparation for adulthood, including cooking, cleaning, understanding and managing time, following instructions and routines, and managing transitions. Particular attention is given to supporting pupils through key transitions, including transition to secondary school.

RSHE Curriculum Content

The RSHE programme develops pupils' knowledge in age and developmentally appropriate ways. Leaders have carefully considered the school's priorities for individual pupils' personal development and matched the programme to pupils' needs, recognising that pupils with SEND may face increased risks relating to their age rather than their developmental stage.

Essential Content:

- Correct names of body parts, with pupils understanding that these parts are private and developing skills to express their own boundaries
- Identifying whether they are a boy or girl and developing age-appropriate understanding of personal identity
- Growth and body changes, particularly during adolescence, including the human lifecycle and puberty (including periods)
- Benefits of physical activity, time outdoors, good nutrition, sufficient sleep, and relationships between physical health and mental wellbeing
- Characteristics of a healthy lifestyle, including physical activity and maintaining a healthy weight
- **Dental hygiene** taught explicitly through supervised teeth-brushing programme and within RSHE lessons
- Importance of equality and respect, celebrating what we have in common across cultural, religious, ethnic, and socioeconomic communities
- Recognising and challenging bullying and unkindness

Delivery and Accessibility: Staff delivering RSHE have the knowledge, skills, and confidence to create safe and supportive environments. Staff are trained in safeguarding and recognise the increased possibility of disclosures. Teaching is adapted using visual supports, symbols, communication boards, and total communication approaches. Content is delivered through discrete RSHE lessons, cross-curricular links, and embedded learning within daily routines and real-life contexts. The PSHE and RSHE lead works closely with colleagues to ensure subjects complement and don't duplicate content covered in other subjects.

Parent Engagement: The school proactively engages parents, showing them a representative sample of resources and enabling them to continue conversations started in class. Parents can view all curriculum materials used to teach RSHE on request.

Life Skills Curriculum

A progressive Life Skills Curriculum has been implemented across all five pathway models, carefully sequenced to build pupils' independence, confidence, and ability to function safely within the community and wider society. Learning is personalised to pupils' developmental needs whilst ensuring progression in essential life skills.

Pupils are explicitly taught practical and social skills including eating independently, personal hygiene, travelling safely in the community, using money, understanding stranger danger, seeking help in public places, and using public transport including Oyster cards. This supports pupils to become responsible, respectful, and active citizens.

Practical Learning Environments: A dedicated **Life Skills Room** designed as a studio flat environment (including kitchen, dining area, bedroom, and daily living spaces) enables pupils to rehearse and generalise functional skills through practical experiences within a safe

and structured setting. Staff report growing confidence in delivering these experiences and understanding the importance of experiential learning for pupils with SEND.

British Values

British Values are embedded throughout the curriculum and daily practice:

- **Democracy:** Everyone has a voice, with staff encouraging non-verbal and verbal methods of communication; children are encouraged to make choices
- **Rule of Law:** Clear, consistent behaviour policy with high expectations; behaviour support systems work on proactive strategies and self-regulation using visual supports
- **Individual Liberty:** Inclusion of all pupils and staff with specialist resources allowing all to achieve and participate; broad and balanced curriculum that is child-led, encourages independence, and allows choice-making
- **Mutual Respect:** Promoting positive relationships with children given classroom responsibilities; PSHE and social skills teaching children how to make friends, be kind, and respect others' opinions
- **Tolerance:** Focus on world events to positively reinforce life, culture, and religions of others

Values are woven throughout the curriculum, school ethos, and daily interactions rather than taught as standalone lessons.

Whole-School Initiatives

Health and Wellbeing Programmes:

- Supervised **teeth-brushing programme**
- **"Magic Breakfast" initiative** ensuring pupils begin the day ready to learn while explicitly teaching social context, etiquette, and routines associated with eating together (staff model and teach communication, turn-taking, choice-making, and independence)

Educational Visits and Community Engagement: Educational visits are embedded across pathways, including visits to Natural History Museum, Deen City Farm, East Surrey Museum, Ferring Country Centre, and local community settings. Leaders have prioritised staff training and confidence in planning, risk assessing, and safely executing visits for pupils with complex SEND. Staff are increasingly confident in extending learning beyond the classroom.

Pupil Voice and Leadership: An active **School Council** provides opportunities for pupils to take responsibility (e.g., distributing fruit across the school) and contribute meaningfully to school improvement discussions and community projects such as litter picking. The **"Tree of Hope" installation** in the foyer area was co-created by pupils and staff, with pupils' handprints forming the leaves and adults' handprints forming the roots, symbolising the school community working together to nurture growth, belonging, and aspiration.

Community Partnerships: Strong links with the local fire station enable pupils to visit the station and engage with emergency service staff. The fire brigade has visited the school, providing opportunities to explore a fire engine and interact with firefighters, developing understanding of community safety and trusted adults.

Extra-Curricular Activities: Children extend their interests through clubs including Lego, Football, Multi-skills, Book Club, Board games club, and Choir. The choir sings annually at the Croydon School Music Concert at Fairfield Halls.

Evidence-Informed Practice

Current research around communication, visual supports, and cognitive processing for pupils with SEND underpins curriculum implementation across all pathways. Leaders have embedded the use of visuals, symbols, communication boards, structured routines, and total communication approaches to reduce anxiety, increase understanding, and promote independence. Staff are increasingly skilled in adapting communication methods to meet individual needs, enabling pupils to access learning more successfully and develop confidence in expressing themselves.

Assessment and Monitoring

To strengthen assessment within PSED, a bespoke **PSED Assessment Framework** has been collaboratively developed by members of the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) and Middle Leadership Team (MLT). The framework has been derived from a range of assessment approaches and developmental frameworks that scaffold and promote the way pupils with complex SEND learn most effectively.

The assessment document reflects the school's holistic approach to learning, recognising progress across communication, emotional regulation, independence, social interaction, wellbeing, and preparation for adulthood. The framework aligns closely with the needs of pupils across all pathways and supports staff in identifying small-step progress and meaningful outcomes. **The framework will be formally implemented from September 2026**, with staff training and moderation processes planned to ensure consistency and accuracy.

Inclusion and Equity

All pupils, especially disadvantaged pupils, those with SEND, those known or previously known to children's social care, and those who may face other barriers to their learning and/or wellbeing, benefit from high-quality personal development opportunities. All pupils have equal access to and participate in interesting and relevant extra-curricular activities, with reasonable adjustments made to enable full participation for all learners.

Areas of Development

Strategy Driver 1: Positive Partnerships

Continued drive to improve the student's presence in the wider community through educational visits and community trips, increased visitors in school; links with local community facilities and further developing pupil voice.

Develop specific assessment frameworks to better capture progress such as PSED and communication framework

Strategy Driver 3: Purposeful and Engaging Environments

Adapting all areas to meet the changing cohort of the school evidenced by implementing whole school expectations of what a classroom and beyond looks like when learning.

Purposeful engagement and learning in all areas of the school evidences by prompt sheets and communication boards in all learning areas; staff knowledge and understanding of classroom climate and being responsive to this; staff active in capturing learning beyond the classroom

Early Years

Evaluation: Needs Attention

The school prioritises Early Years with personalised teaching and strong focus on social and communication skills. However, children enter Reception with varied levels of development, requiring on-going support. Reception teachers have also only just started to use the schools Assessment Frameworks for baseline and achievement across the year and to inform transition to Year 1.

Discovery Pathway: The Foundation Year

At St Nicholas School, the Early Years provision is the **Discovery Pathway**. All Reception children join Discovery regardless of their specific needs or diagnosis. This crucial baseline year allows staff to deeply understand each child's unique learning profile, communication needs, sensory preferences, and social interaction style, which then informs their pathway placement as they progress through the school.

The EYFS provides an exceptional start to pupils' educational journey, with provision carefully tailored to meet the complex and diverse needs of the youngest learners. Staff demonstrate strong knowledge and understanding of **Development Matters**, which is thoroughly incorporated into planning, ensuring the curriculum is ambitious, sequenced appropriately, and builds progressively on pupils' starting points.

Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) Curriculum

Children in our EYFS/Reception class follow the continuous provision model, with a specific focus in each EYFS area each term. Our curriculum is organised around engaging, child-centred themes across the six terms: 'Me, Myself and I' (Autumn 1), 'Time to Celebrate' (Autumn 2), 'Once Upon a Time' (Spring 1), 'Are We There Yet?' (Spring 2), 'Do You Believe in Magic?' (Summer 1), and 'To Infinity and Beyond' (Summer 2). Within each theme, we cover all seven areas of learning and development from the EYFS framework: Communication and Language, Physical Development, Personal, Social and Emotional Development, Literacy, Mathematics, Understanding the World, and Expressive Arts and Design. Our curriculum is carefully differentiated to meet the individual developmental needs of our pupils, using a multi-sensory approach that supports engagement and understanding. We introduce children to Little Wandle phonics and Handwriting Without Tears programmes, adapted to each child's ability level. In addition to the EYFS learning areas, we also incorporate computing, exposing children to a wide range of hardware, software and apps (such as iPads, computers, interactive whiteboards, big switches, remote control cars, microphones, and Beebots) and helping them understand what technology is best for different purposes. Our EYFS curriculum includes enrichment opportunities such as educational visits, visitors to school, and hands-on experiences that bring learning to life and support our pupils' understanding of the world around them.

Learning Environment

Indoor Environment: The learning environment is exceptionally well-organised, engaging, and calm, with all areas of the EYFS curriculum represented both inside and outside the classroom. The indoor space features clearly defined areas including role play, book corner, maths areas, and fine motor skills stations, which provide structure and help pupils understand the purpose of different spaces. Resources are accessible and labelled with symbols to promote independence, enabling pupils to make choices, select materials, and take ownership of their learning. Sensory considerations are central to the design, with calm, uncluttered, and engaging spaces that support pupils' ability to focus, regulate, and learn effectively. The careful organisation reduces sensory overload whilst maintaining visual interest and stimulation appropriate to pupils' needs.

Visual Supports: Visual supports are integrated throughout the environment, including visual timetables, Now and Next boards, and choice boards, which are further enhanced by sensory stimuli such as moisturisers to support depicting days of the week and weather. This multi-sensory approach ensures that information is accessible to all learners and supports the development of understanding of time, routine, and the world around them.

Outdoor Provision: Outdoor provision is equally well-considered, with a designated playground that includes climbing equipment to develop gross motor skills, coordination, and physical confidence. Pupils have access to bikes and trikes, which support physical development, spatial awareness, and turn-taking skills. Exploratory play opportunities such as a mud kitchen, water play, and natural materials encourage curiosity, investigation, and sensory exploration, connecting pupils with the natural world and supporting learning across all areas of the curriculum.

Continuous provision in shared outdoor areas ensures that children can access outdoor learning throughout the day, recognising the vital importance of outdoor play for physical health, wellbeing, and development. This seamless indoor-outdoor provision enables pupils to move freely between environments, following their interests and developmental needs whilst benefiting from fresh air, physical activity, and diverse learning experiences.

Continuous Provision and Skill Development

Continuous provision is strategically designed to focus on developing **early attention and engagement skills**, which are fundamental to all future learning. Specialist areas including role play spaces support the development of social and early play skills, whilst carefully structured play and lunchtime routines help pupils learn essential skills such as sharing and turn-taking in meaningful, real-world contexts.

Foundation Skills: Foundation skills are prioritised and taught systematically, including:

- Pre-writing and mark-making using different mediums to develop fine motor skills
- Early counting and number recognition
- Communication skills using a total communication approach
- Early Phonics by using Little Wandle Foundation Programme before moving to Phase 2 sounds

Staff have the confidence, knowledge, and expertise to adapt teaching throughout the day so that learning is fully child-led, responding flexibly to pupils' interests, needs, and developmental readiness whilst maintaining high expectations for all.

Communication and Accessibility

Staff make excellent use of communication aids to support accessibility and understanding, including visual timetables, Now and Next boards, individual timetables, GRID systems, and communication boards. This ensures that all pupils, regardless of their communication abilities, can understand routines, make choices, and participate fully in learning.
The nurturing approach of staff creates a safe, supportive environment where pupils feel secure and confident to explore, take risks in their learning, and develop independence. **Teaching Assistants are deployed highly effectively**, working closely with teachers to provide targeted support, facilitate learning through play, and ensure that individual pupils' needs are met. This strong team approach ensures consistency and enables staff to build deep knowledge of each child's strengths, interests, and next steps.

High-Quality Interactions and Play-Based Learning

The EYFS is underpinned by high-quality interactions and a carefully balanced approach to play-based learning that recognises the central importance of play in young children's development. Staff skilfully balance **child-initiated play with adult-led activities**, ensuring that pupils have opportunities to explore, experiment, and follow their own interests whilst also benefiting from structured teaching that builds essential knowledge and skills.

Child-Led Learning: Learning is driven by the interests of children, with staff carefully observing play and using these observations to shape provision, plan meaningful experiences, and extend learning in ways that are engaging and relevant to individual pupils.

Quality Interactions: High-quality interactions are at the heart of practice, with staff consistently:

- Modelling language
- Using repetition of key vocabulary
- Singing rhymes to support communication development and make learning memorable and enjoyable
- Using scaffolding techniques expertly, providing the right level of support to enable pupils to achieve beyond what they could do independently, gradually reducing support as confidence and competence grow
- Using open-ended questions thoughtfully to encourage thinking, problem-solving, and communication
- Remaining highly responsive to all forms of communication and interaction, valuing and building upon every attempt pupils make to communicate, whether through words, gestures, signs, symbols, or behaviour

This responsive, nurturing approach ensures that all pupils feel heard, understood, and valued, creating the secure foundations necessary for learning, development, and the cultivation of positive relationships.

Partnership Working

Family Engagement: Staff build excellent relationships with children and their families, recognising that parents are children's first educators and that strong home-school partnerships are essential for pupils' progress and wellbeing. There is good support for families, with staff proactively signposting to other agencies and working closely with the Family Liaison Officer (FLO) and external multi-disciplinary team (MDT) to ensure holistic support.

Multi-Agency Collaboration: Staff build strong collaborative relationships with other professionals including Occupational Therapists, Speech and Language Therapists, and Behaviour specialists, ensuring that expert advice is integrated into daily practice and that pupils receive coordinated, consistent support across all areas of their development.

Transition Planning

Transition to Year 1: Transition to Year 1 is carefully planned and managed, with staff ensuring that pupils are well-prepared for the next stage of their education. This includes gradually increasing structure and expectations, developing independence skills, and working closely with Year 1 staff to ensure continuity and that pupils' individual needs, interests, and achievements are understood and built upon. The strong foundations established in EYFS ensure that pupils are ready to access the Key Stage 1 curriculum with confidence. Children in Discovery are now assessed across the year on the school's own Assessment Frameworks to ensure the transition to appropriate pathway placement in Year 1 is seamless.

AREAS FOR DEVELOPMENT

Strategy Driver 2: Investment in People

To continue to review the EYFS curriculum as the cohort of our children changes
To use the school's own Assessment Bands to assess the children which will demonstrate individual progress more clearly
To embed transition from Nursery provision to Reception and from Reception to year.

Strategy Driver 3: Purposeful and Engaging Environments

Purposeful engagement and learning in all areas of the school evidenced by prompt sheets for all learning spaces; staff knowledge and understanding of classroom climate and be responsive to this; and staff being active in capturing learning beyond the classroom
Adapting all areas to meet the changing cohort of the school evidenced by the development of outside learning areas.

Leadership and Governance

Evaluation: Expected Standard
Leaders demonstrate a clear vision, provide strong CPD, and maintain robust safeguarding.

Strategic Leadership and Professional Culture

Leaders at St Nicholas School have established and sustained a strong culture of staff professionalism, demonstrating consistently high standards of principled and professional conduct whilst acting in the best interests of pupils. This has been particularly important given the relatively inexperienced workforce.

Building Professional Culture: To instil this professional culture, leaders have:

- Developed and agreed a **whole school staff charter** with staff that clearly articulates expectations for staff attitude and behaviour
- Ensured comprehensive policy awareness and adherence across the school, with all staff fully conversant with and following school policies and procedures
- Set and maintained high expectations for professional conduct, creating an environment where staff understand their role in achieving excellent outcomes for pupils

Monitoring and Quality Assurance: Leaders have established systems for monitoring and quality assurance that are fair, valid, and constructive, providing staff with high-quality feedback to inform continuous improvement. The robust monitoring framework for Teaching and Learning includes:

- In-depth observations with comprehensive feedback that support teachers to develop their practice and expertise
- Formal and informal learning walks providing regular insight into the quality of education across the school
- Strategic deployment of Pathway Leads and Middle Management who work collaboratively to identify where further support is needed, whether for individual staff members or whole class teams

This detailed and insightful analysis of school performance enables leaders to evaluate the effectiveness of provision accurately, identify priorities for improvement, and take appropriate action.

School Development Plan: The School Development Plan reflects a strategic and collaborative approach to school improvement. Leaders have worked closely with Leadership Matters to identify three key strategic drivers that will underpin the school's development over the next three years: Positive Partnerships (focusing on community engagement, parent involvement and collaborative working), Investment in People (prioritising staff wellbeing, professional development and robust accountability systems), and Purposeful and Engaging Environments (developing learning spaces both inside and outside the classroom). These drivers have been translated into clear annual milestones for years 1, 2 and 3, with further breakdown into termly expectations and assigned responsibilities. Supporting this strategic framework are comprehensive action plans for Teaching and Learning, Communication and Safeguarding, ensuring that school improvement is embedded in everyday practice.

Governance

St Nicholas School has an enthusiastic governing body who ensure the vision, ethos, and strategic direction of the school are clearly defined for all stakeholders. Governors demonstrate a strong commitment to their role and actively work to develop their understanding of the school's work.

Governor Development and Engagement: To enable them to confidently challenge and support leaders, governors participate in a range of governor engagement events including:

- In-school learning sessions covering key aspects of provision such as Evidence for Learning and Little Wandle, the Pathway Model, and curriculum design and implementation
- These engagement opportunities ensure that governors use their knowledge and expertise to provide consistent support and robust challenge to leaders across all aspects of the school's work
- Through these sessions, governors develop the detailed understanding they need to ask informed questions about provision and hold leaders to account effectively for outcomes

Visibility and Community Engagement: Governors are highly visible within the school community, demonstrating their commitment to understanding the full breadth of school life. They are regularly present at whole-school events such as Winter Craft Activities, Christmas Shows, Sports Days, School Picnic, and Leaver Assemblies. This presence enables governors to see first-hand the impact of school policies and practices on pupils' experiences, and to engage meaningfully with pupils, staff, and families.

Strategic Oversight: Governors ensure that the vision, ethos, and strategic direction of the school are clearly defined, take account of context, and make sure resources are used effectively. They support and challenge leaders appropriately by:

- Holding leaders to account for the impact of improvement priorities
- Ensuring systems protect and support staff wellbeing
- Maintaining oversight of provision for all pupil groups, particularly disadvantaged and vulnerable pupils

Staff Wellbeing: The wellbeing and workload of leaders and staff is prioritised by governors. Governors understand their role as the responsible body in considering and addressing leaders' workload and wellbeing, and actively engage with this responsibility through regular dialogue with senior leaders about workforce sustainability and staff support.

Staff Wellbeing and Workload

Leaders take account of staff wellbeing and ensure workload is manageable. This commitment is embedded through policies, practices, systems, and day-to-day practice.

Time for Planning and Preparation: Leaders have implemented several strategic measures to ensure that staff have sufficient time to plan, prepare, and complete their work to a high standard:

- **Teacher PPA time exceeds the statutory 10%**, demonstrating commitment to providing adequate time for planning, preparation, and assessment
- Teachers and leaders have regular opportunities to take their PPA from home, giving flexibility and protected time away from the school environment to focus on planning and preparation without interruption
- The **Annual Review timetable is set in advance**, ensuring teachers are aware well ahead of time when paperwork needs to be written and sent, allowing them to plan their workload effectively
- Additional time is allocated for holding annual review meetings, recognising their importance and ensuring staff are not rushed or overburdened

Clear Communication and Planning:

- The **academic year calendar is shared at the start of the year**, giving staff visibility of key events and deadlines across the year so they can plan accordingly and avoid last-minute pressures
- Clear expectations and timelines are communicated well in advance for all major tasks and events
- The curriculum is robust and in-depth, meaning that teachers and class leaders can easily adapt learning to individual classes and pupils without needing to create extensive planning from scratch. This reduces the burden of curriculum design on individual teachers, ensures consistency and quality across the school, and allows teachers to focus their time on personalising learning

Training and Support: Effective training and guidance is in place to support staff with pupil paperwork, including: Support Plans and Risk Assessments; Pupil Learning Goals; Evidence for Learning; EHCPs and Annual Reviews; and Other key pupil information.
This comprehensive training ensures that staff understand expectations, can complete paperwork efficiently and accurately, and feel confident in their administrative responsibilities.
Protection and Professional Culture: Leaders have effective systems in place to protect staff from bullying, unlawful discrimination, harassment, and victimisation. Effective systems are in place and staff have received training to support understanding of key policies such as: Staff Grievance procedures; Preventing Sexual harassment in the workplace; and Dignity at work Policy.
This ensures that staff firstly treat each other with respect, but also are aware of how they can be supported if they feel they are not being treated appropriately. Leaders are proactive in creating a professional culture where all staff feel safe, valued, and respected.
Staff Voice: Leaders actively seek and respond to staff feedback through multiple channels:

- **Annual staff survey** where staff are encouraged to complete so that leaders can gather information about what they are doing well and what needs improving
- Regular feedback from Pathway Leads during regular pathway meetings, ensuring that the views of middle leaders are heard and acted upon
- **Open door policy** where SLT make themselves accessible to staff who need support, have concerns, or wish to share ideas

This culture of listening and responding to staff ensures that workload and wellbeing concerns are identified early and addressed promptly, and that staff voices are valued in shaping the school's direction.
Professional Learning and Expertise
Leaders establish a strong culture of staff professionalism, which includes a commitment from all staff to continuous improvement in their expertise and effectiveness.
Leadership as Role Models: Leaders prioritise and participate in professional learning, acting as role models for all staff. Middle leaders, senior leaders, and the therapy and behaviour team regularly share their expertise through:

- Staff training programmes delivering structured learning opportunities aligned to school priorities
- Workshops providing focused, practical sessions on specific aspects of practice
- Modelling to new or inexperienced staff, demonstrating effective practice in real classroom contexts

This collaborative approach ensures that expertise is shared across the team and that less experienced staff benefit from the knowledge and skills of their more experienced colleagues.
Induction Programme: The school has a robust and thorough induction programme so that new staff are trained in key aspects of their role from the outset. This ensures they can work safely and effectively from day one, and includes essential training in:

- Safeguarding - ensuring all staff understand their responsibilities to keep children safe
- Behaviour approach - equipping staff with the strategies and understanding they need to support positive behaviour and manage challenging situations
- Communication strategies - developing staff's ability to support pupils' communication needs effectively
- Supporting children within the classroom - providing practical skills for differentiation, adaptation, and meeting individual needs

This comprehensive induction reduces anxiety for new staff, accelerates their effectiveness, and ensures consistency of approach across the school.
Support for Early Career Teachers (ECTs) and Trainee Teachers: Leaders ensure that any ECTs and trainee teachers on placement receive the support they need to develop their teaching expertise. The school has a number of new teachers who are either on the ECT programme or on a pathway to train to teach with the school. Bespoke support is given to ECTs and trainee teachers by the leadership team and by middle leaders, particularly the middle leader for teacher development.
Support Delivery: Support is delivered through multiple, complementary approaches:

- Regular observations and constructive feedback - providing new teachers with clear, actionable insights into their practice
- Team teaching and modelling - allowing new teachers to see expert practice in action and to gradually build their skills through supported practice
- Extensive mentor support - providing structured mentoring sessions to provide targeted feedback, working with the ECT and colleagues to make sure they receive a high-quality, **ITTECF-based induction programme**, and providing subject- or phase-specific coaching

The induction programme is carefully designed to support new teachers in developing expertise across key areas: behaviour management, pedagogy, curriculum, assessment, and professional behaviours. During induction, **ECTs have timetable reductions from the rest of the teaching staff - 10% reduction in the first year and 5% reduction in the second year**. ECTs' time 'off timetable' is used to undertake activities in their induction programme, including training and mentoring.
Integration with Whole-School Professional Learning: Support for ECTs and trainee teachers is fully integrated with the whole-school professional learning programme. New teachers benefit from:

- Access to all in-house training programmes (such as Attention Autism, GRID, sensory regulation, Intensive Interaction, and Little Wandle Phonics)
- Pathway-specific training adapted to the needs of their cohort
- Opportunities to observe and learn from experienced colleagues across different pathways
- Regular opportunities to collaborate with their peers and share their developing practice

Specialist Knowledge for Special Schools: The school recognises that teaching in a special school requires additional, specialist knowledge and skills. Support for new teachers places particular emphasis on:

- Understanding and meeting the needs of pupils with SEND
- Developing expertise in communication strategies and alternative and augmentative communication (AAC)
- Learning to adapt teaching for pupils at different developmental stages
- Understanding sensory needs and regulation strategies
- Building confidence in managing complex behaviour with compassion and skill

High-Quality CPD Opportunities: Leaders ensure that staff have access to high-quality, evidence-informed, sustained, and coherent professional learning programmes that build expertise and are aligned to balance the priorities of whole-school improvement, subjects/teams/phases, and individual needs. Leaders value professional learning and actively encourage staff to pursue high-quality CPD opportunities.

Teachers are encouraged to seek CPD in key areas such as: TEACCH (Treatment and Education of Autistic and related Communication-handicapped Children); Sensory learning and communication; Maths and English; Learning through Play; and **National Professional Qualifications (NPQs)** with teachers completing programmes such as NPQ in Leading Teaching, NPQ in Leading Behaviour and Culture, and NPQ for SENCOs

Leadership Commitment to Professional Learning: Leaders model their commitment to professional learning at the highest levels:

- The **Head Teacher is completing a Masters degree**, demonstrating personal commitment to continuous improvement and evidence-informed practice
- The **Senior Leadership Team are taking part in a Leading Together course**, which is supporting them in building their capacity to work collaboratively and create lasting, sustainable improvement

Leaders ensure that professional learning opportunities draw on the best available evidence, including high-quality research and expert provision from beyond and within the school, including nationally recognised career and professional frameworks and programmes, to build capacity and support succession planning.

Alignment with School Development Plan: Staff training and development is aligned closely with the School Development Plan, ensuring that professional learning is purposeful, coherent, and directly focused on achieving improvement priorities. Leaders allocate appropriate time and other resources to a coherent programme of evidence-informed professional learning for all staff.

In-House Training Programme: Professional learning includes purposeful collaboration between teachers and staff on key aspects of provision. The comprehensive in-house training programme covers essential areas of practice, including: Attention Autism, GRID, Sensory regulation, Intensive Interaction, Fine motor skills, Little Wandle Phonics, Writing observations on Evidence for Learning, Colourful Semantics.

Some twilight sessions are Pathway-specific, so that staff within each pathway have bespoke training on how to adapt the curriculum and learning to the cohort they have.

External Expertise: The school also brings in external speakers to provide specialist knowledge and challenge thinking. Recent examples include: Dr Pooky Knightsmith who led a session on Pathological Demand Avoidance (PDA) for both staff and parents; and Speakers on sensitive topics such as Preventing sexual harassment in the workplace and Building an anti-racist school culture

Evidence-Based CPD: Professional development and monitoring of teaching and learning is evidence-based and research-informed, following a structured approach recommended by the **Education Endowment Foundation (EEF)**. The CPD programme has been developed around themes of high-quality teaching, which are then carefully adapted for each pathway to ensure that professional learning is precisely matched to the specific needs and developmental stages of different groups of pupils.

Impact Monitoring: The impact of the CPD programme is monitored using a combination of: Pupil progress, structured feedback, and self-reflection tools; Improvements in pupil achievement and progression through observations and pupil progress data; Pupil engagement and attendance; and The quality of relationships between teachers and pupils

Parental, Professional and Community Engagement

Leaders work closely and effectively with pupils, parents, professionals, and staff to ensure that every child receives the comprehensive support they need to thrive. Leaders and staff work closely with the wider multi-disciplinary team to ensure that the correct support is put in place for all pupils at an early stage. This proactive approach to identifying and addressing needs means that barriers to learning and wellbeing are tackled swiftly and effectively.

External Agency Partnerships: The school has established strong working relationships with key external agencies, including:

- **Educational Psychology team** - providing specialist assessment, advice, and intervention strategies to support pupils with complex learning and emotional needs
- **School nursing team** - supporting pupils' physical and mental health needs, and providing health education and intervention
- **Social care services** - working collaboratively to safeguard and support vulnerable pupils and their families

These effective relationships with external agencies enable the school to draw on specialist expertise when necessary to support pupils' development, ensuring comprehensive response to the diverse and complex needs of pupils.

System Leadership: Leaders make a positive contribution to the wider education system. This commitment is demonstrated through active support of other schools within the borough:

- Leaders and staff regularly support other maintained special schools in Croydon - sharing expertise, resources, and best practice in special educational needs provision
- Local schools in the South Croydon cluster receive advice, training, and collaborative working opportunities to support mainstream schools in meeting the needs of pupils with SEND

This system leadership work ensures that expertise benefits not only the school's own pupils, but contributes to improving outcomes for children with SEND across the wider Croydon community. Leaders work with other schools, organisations, and professionals in a culture of mutual support and challenge, strengthening provision across the local area and building sustainable networks of support.
Through these partnerships and collaborative relationships, leaders demonstrate their commitment to working beyond the boundaries of their own school to improve educational opportunities and outcomes for all children.

AREAS OF DEVELOPMENT

Strategy Driver 1: Positive Partnerships

Continued drive to improve our presence in the wider community by exploring links with local primary school and continued networking within local SEN cluster groups.
Continued drive to improve our Parent Engagement offer by further modification of parent engagement events and direct contact between school and parents.

Strategy driver 2: Investment in People

To support staff through the implementation of the Trauma Informed approach by training relevant staff to deliver a supervision model
To build on Staff Professional Culture by refining procedures for staff absence
To recruit staff into support roles such as FLOW and IT. To support TA progression through training