



SCHOOL INSPECTION SERVICE

INSPECTION REPORT FOR NORTH BRIDGE HOUSE SCHOOL

DfE No: 202/6400

The key inspection judgements for this school are:

The quality of education	Outstanding	1
Pupils' personal development	Outstanding	1
Safeguarding pupils' welfare health and safety	Outstanding	1
Leadership, management and governance	Outstanding	1

Compliance with the Independent School Standards:

The school meets the regulatory requirements of schedule 1 of The Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements.

Compliance with the Equality Act 2010:

The school meets the requirements of the Equality Act.

Date of inspection: 1-3 December 2015

SECTION A: SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS

North Bridge House Prep School provides an education for its pupils, which is of outstanding quality in all respects and the school meets its aims very well. Through the curriculum the school is highly successful in providing an educational experience that gives pupils excellent preparation for the highly thought of senior schools that they move on to and a very rich rounded educational experience. Curricular planning is of a high quality and caters very well for pupils of all abilities, with challenging and stimulating work, which is nearly always within a coherent and progressive learning framework for pupils. Only in the area of technological experience is this not fully so and the school is addressing this issue effectively. The quality of teaching is outstanding; it is marked by detailed planning, well-qualified staff with high levels of expertise, driving pace in lessons, excellent explanations and questioning of pupils and excellent relationships with them. The quality of the marking of pupils' work is not quite so consistently excellent. The school has worked hard to improve its assessment system and has developed a programme which provides regular informative assessment data that is easy to use. Teachers use it very effectively to track pupils' progress in learning and to inform their planning. Pupils' personal development is outstanding and the school is very successful in helping pupils to internalise fundamental British values such as democracy. The quality of safeguarding and the provision for the welfare, health and safety of pupils are excellent. Leadership and management have been highly successful in maintaining and improving the very high standards of education achieved at the last inspection during a period of great change for the school, during which it has added a year group and increased substantially in size. The quality of governance has improved since the last inspection, particularly in its oversight of compliance with the regulations, and is of a high quality. The school is a close-knit learning community in which pupils are very well behaved, happy and high achieving. The school meets all the independent school standards fully.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT:

Whilst not required by the regulations, the proprietor should:

- develop a coherent and progressive learning plan for technological education, building on the excellent planning for information and communications technology; and
- ensure that all the marking of the work of all older pupils achieves the same levels of high excellence of that for younger pupils and most older pupils.

SECTION B: INFORMATION

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION:

This inspection was carried out by the School Inspection Service (SIS) in accordance with Section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008. It follows the inspection framework agreed by SIS and the Department for Education (DfE).

In reaching their judgements, the inspectors observed a range of subject lessons and examined samples of pupils' work in the relevant key stages. The school's curriculum documentation, policies and records were scrutinised. Interviews were held with a number of staff in key positions and the inspectors spoke to groups of pupils. They also took account of the questionnaires completed by pupils and parents before the inspection.

The inspectors were:

Reporting Inspector:	Mr Ted Cohn
Team inspectors:	Mr Peter Jones Mr David Young

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

North Bridge House Prep School is an independent co-educational day school for pupils aged seven to thirteen years old. It is one of five schools in the North Bridge House School group that are owned and run by Cognita Ltd. The school opened on its current site in the London Borough of Camden in north London in 1987 and, until September 2012, shared this site with the North Bridge House Senior School. In September 2012 the senior school moved to a new purpose-built site and the Prep School took over the whole of the current site. At the same time it increased its age range, becoming a school for seven to thirteen-year-olds rather than for eight to thirteen-year-olds, and increased its size significantly. It now has 486 pupils on roll, none of whom has a formal education and/or health care plan. Pupils are taught in educational groups in Years 3, 4 and 5, before being organised in boys and girls groups in Year 6, with the girls being prepared for 11+ examinations and the boys starting a three-year programme preparing them for common entrance and scholarship examinations at 13 years old. The school aims to provide a safe nurturing environment for pupils with high-quality teaching, so that they achieve their educational potential, and are successful in gaining places and scholarships to highly thought of senior schools. At the same time, the school aims to give its pupils a rich, satisfying and happy education, so that they become young people who are tolerant, considerate and respectful of others.

SECTION C: THE INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

1. THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The quality of the curriculum

The curriculum is outstanding in its quality and provides excellent learning opportunities for pupils across the full range of educational experiences, with a particular strength in the range and quality of pupils' linguistic experience, which includes English, two modern languages and, for all older pupils, Latin and for some Greek. It provides an enhanced National Curriculum experience for younger pupils and an excellent preparation for the senior schools that the older girls go on to at 11 years old and the boys at 13 years old, with pupils achieving high levels of success in tests, common entrance examinations and scholarships. In addition, through its provision for subjects such as art, drama, music and sport, the many trips and visits undertaken and the very broad-ranging extra-curricular programme, in which the majority of pupils take part; the educational experiences of pupils are significantly enhanced, so that they gain a very rich rounded educational experience.

Medium and long-term planning is excellent and ensures that pupils of all abilities have challenging and stimulating work, through which they can make excellent progress in their learning, with one minor and partial exception. Pupils receive a rich and varied technological experience and in ICT the planning enables pupils to make the same rapid progress as they do in other areas of the curriculum. Pupils are engaged in a number of interesting technological activities in other areas of the curriculum, such as art and science and through the various themed days, which allow in-depth exploration of particular topics, such as steam, but these experiences have not yet been brought together into a coherent progressive learning programme. The school is now making rapid progress in addressing this issue.

The school has been focusing on ensuring that curriculum provision continues to address the learning needs of all its pupils very well in recent years. The provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) is of a high quality. Highly qualified and experienced specialist learning support teachers provide sophisticated diagnostic assessment of learning needs and work closely with teachers and teaching assistants to ensure that these pupils reach their potential in educational achievement, whilst remaining happy and productive members of the school community. The school has 181 pupils who come from homes where English is not the first spoken language. Pupils' understanding of and facility with English is tested on entry to the school and monitored closely as they proceed through the school. The great majority of these pupils have an easy facility with spoken and written English, but the very small minority who do not are given specialist help and support, so that they make rapid progress in overcoming any linguistic problems that would hinder them reaching their full potential. The provision for the most able, gifted and talented pupils does not have the same formal structures, but curricular planning pays close attention to ensuring that these pupils also achieve their full potential through various strategies. These include open-ended tasks that allow high

levels of achievement at various levels, targeted activities for these pupils, such as extension tasks and the grouping of pupils by ability when they are older.

The quality of teaching and assessment

The quality of teaching and assessment is outstanding, with many examples of teaching of the highest quality observed in lessons and no teaching being less than good. Teachers have an excellent command of their teaching material, both in terms of the subjects that they teach and the specific requirements of external tests and examinations for older pupils, and bring to their teaching an easy authority.

Lesson planning is of a high quality, with very careful attention paid to individual learning needs, including those of pupils with SEND and the able, gifted and talented, within lesson objectives that present a high level of challenge for all pupils. The purpose of each lesson is made very clear, how it fits into medium-term planning and relates to pupils' prior learning and achievement, so that pupils understand fully what they should be learning. Combined with this, teachers bring a lively enthusiasm to their teaching, which encourages and enthuses pupils in their learning.

Teachers provide excellent explanations, which are clear and often interesting. They use questioning extremely well to test and consolidate knowledge and explore issues. Lessons are very well organised, with a variety of activities that take learning on very effectively, often involving well focused teacher talk and discussion, combined with individual and small group work, together with highly effective consolidation of learning at the end of the lesson. Class management is highly efficient so that very little time is lost in moving from one activity to another. Teachers and teaching assistants are very effective in moving around the class supporting and encouraging pupils, reflecting the efficacy of their joint planning of lessons activities and their detailed knowledge of individual pupils' needs. These factors all contribute to the driving pace of learning that is such a strong feature of most lessons and helps to give pupils a deep sense of satisfaction with their learning experiences.

A strong sense of mutual trust and respect between teachers and pupils is reflected in their excellent relationships and this underpins the fine quality of teaching and learning. Teachers and teaching assistants monitor the progress of pupils closely during lessons and provide helpful and encouraging feedback on work done, which supports and stimulates progress in learning very well. Most of the marking of pupils' work is excellent: it is constructive, encouraging, diagnostic and includes demanding but achievable targets for further progress. This is particularly so in the marking of pupils' work lower down the school. In a small number of instances, the marking of some older pupils' work does not reach this level of excellence and, whilst always conscientious and helpful, is not as effective in supporting pupils' learning.

The school has developed an excellent system for accessing, tracking and recording pupils' progress and achievement. It draws on a wide range of diagnostic tests of proven worth to ascertain pupils' abilities on entry to the school

and track their progress closely as they proceed through the school, in combination with detailed and perceptive teacher judgements. Older pupils commented very positively on how the tracking system also helps them to know how well they were doing and what they have to work on in order to improve their performance.

Pupils' learning and achievement

The quality of pupils' learning and achievement is outstandingly good. Pupils quickly develop high-quality speaking and listening skills and the capacity to settle to work very quickly. They work with great concentration on tasks set. They also collaborate very well with each other and develop the characteristics of highly competent independent learners, who not only want to achieve very well themselves, but also want their friends and peers to do so as well. The pupils respond positively to the high expectations of teachers and increasingly internalise these themselves.

Pupils' written work and learning and achievement in lessons provide secure evidence of the high levels of achievement of all pupils, whatever their starting points. This is also reflected in the great success of pupils in the tests they take at 11 years old and in the common entrance examination at 13 years old, so they go on to highly thought of senior schools, with many achieving scholarships as well. High standards are also achieved in areas such as art, drama, music and sport.

2. THE QUALITY OF PUPILS' PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

The quality of pupils' personal development is outstanding and reflects one of the key aims of the school: to educate pupils in a nurturing environment where they learn tolerance, consideration and respect for others.

From an early age, pupils develop a strong sense of self-esteem and responsibility for their learning and behaviour, as was indicated in their exemplary behaviour during the inspection. They benefit greatly from the excellent role models that their teachers provide in courtesy, respect and care, and respond well to the high standards of behaviour expected of them. Similarly, the ethos of high achievement in a collaborative and supportive learning environment encourages both self-reliance and cooperation between pupils, as was witnessed on several occasions when pupils spontaneously helped each other with a particular problem or issue. Understanding the importance of moral values and living by them in a way that is kind and tolerant is an underpinning principle and one which pupils learn from an early age. Through the personal, social, health and economic education (PSHEE) programme, assemblies, the moral issues and dilemmas arising and considered in many subjects of the curriculum, such as geography, history, English, science and particularly religious education, pupils develop an increasingly sophisticated understanding of the morality on which British values of democracy, liberty and respect are founded. They also learn about the importance of supporting those who are less fortunate than themselves and engage enthusiastically in fund-raising for charities, both local, such as

Wednesday's Heroes, and national and international, such as the Global Fund for Children, and an African development project.

Great care is taken to support the social development of pupils, through teacher expectations, support and guidance, so that the ability to think about and reflect on personal actions becomes internalised. Through the PSHEE programme, assemblies and various subjects, pupils develop a good understanding of the key institutions of British democratic society and their functions. They also develop their skills in evidence-based argument, a key skill in democratic society. Through the various school council bodies pupils can exercise democratic rights and during the last election they took part in mock elections. The local Member of Parliament has visited the school and pupils have visited the Houses of Parliament as well. In all these activities, and others, the school is careful to ensure that no political bias creeps in and school leaders are highly vigilant in ensuring that there is no attempt to radicalise pupils. The recent Prevent training for staff has helped to increase their understanding of ways in which the radicalisation of pupils is attempted. The many sporting and other extra-curricular activities offer excellent opportunities for pupils to demonstrate good teamwork and leadership.

The varied and stimulating art programme in the school provides many opportunities for pupils to experience the wonder and beauty of great art and develop their own taste in art, as well as experience the great pleasure of making art. As well as drama lessons, pupils participate in various drama activities from the annual playlets put on for parents by each age group to major productions such as the Canterbury Tales. Similarly, pupils are engaged in making music. Singing is of a high quality and the school runs three orchestras, five choirs and several instrumental groups, all of which contributes significantly to pupils' spiritual and cultural development.

In a school where pupils speak 34 different languages at home and teachers come from a range of cultural backgrounds, cultural difference and variety is a lived in experience. This experience is greatly enhanced through subjects such as art, geography, history, modern and classical languages and music, as well as assemblies, the celebration of various cultural festivals and learning about the major world religions. The many visits and trips that pupils make further enhance pupils' rich cultural experience.

3. SAFEGUARDING PUPILS' WELFARE, HEALTH AND SAFETY

The safeguarding of pupils' welfare, health and safety is excellent and ensures that pupils are happy, healthy and safe at school.

The school's arrangements for the safeguarding of pupils are comprehensive and very thorough. The parent company, Cognita, has instituted a process of continual monitoring and review of policies and practice that is very effective in helping to ensure that all aspects of safeguarding practice are implemented fully and effectively. The school has a designated safeguarding lead (DSL) and a deputy, who both have up-to-date inter-agency training, as does the headmaster,

who retains a close watching brief. The DSL and deputy carry out their roles very efficiently, including close liaison with outside agencies, where necessary, and ensure that all staff, including new recruits, have regular detailed, comprehensive training in and discussion about the school's high quality procedures and practice in safeguarding. These include key aspects, such as protection against sexual abuse and exploitation and radicalisation, through the school's Prevent strategy, as well as training in e-safety. A particular strength of pupils' education in e-safety is the manner in which it is integrated into learning activities, so that it becomes a natural part of pupils' practice at school and at home. In addition, all staff, pupils and parents sign and are required to adhere to the Acceptable Use of Technology Agreement, which outlines in detail good practice and unacceptable behaviour in using ICT. The comprehensive e-safety document is available on the school's website.

Arrangements for the safer recruitment of staff suitable to work with children are very thorough and searching. The Single Central Register (SCR) provides a very clear record of all the necessary checks carried out. The documentation supporting the SCR is meticulous in its detail and particular attention is paid to obtaining further evidence of suitability to work with children from foreign nationals and those who have worked in other countries. Recruitment interviews are rigorous and always have at least one person involved who has done training in the safer recruitment of staff.

The school's very successful management of pupils' behaviour is founded on the high levels of mutual trust and respect between pupils and staff and their excellent relationships. The school has clear and constructive policies, which are understood by pupils, carried out consistently in practice, and promote good and responsible behaviour strongly through praise and the rewarding of acts of kindness and consideration, as well as taking responsibility. Where there is any misbehaviour this is dealt with swiftly and constructively, following the relevant school policy. Pupils spoken to were adamant that bullying is not part of the culture of the school and there were very few cases of bullying. On the odd occasion that it had occurred it had been dealt with swiftly and positively, so that the bullying ceased and relationships were quickly healed.

The arrangements to support the health and safety of pupils are comprehensive and effective in keeping pupils safe. Regular checks and surveys of the site are carried out and staff are strongly encouraged to report any issues or concerns that they have. Necessary maintenance is carried out swiftly and to a high standard. Detailed, informative risk assessments are carried out for all appropriate activities in the school and for those outside the school, from going into Regents' Park to foreign trips. The regular testing of various pieces of machinery and equipment is done and evidenced with appropriate care. Fire drills are carried out regularly: a good record is kept, so that it is clear that the buildings are evacuated quickly and efficiently.

The arrangements for first aid are good and more than enough staff have had the relevant in date certificated first aid training. The school medical room is fit for purpose, including for the medical examination of pupils if necessary. Admission and attendance registers are well kept and fully compliant with the statutory requirements.

4. LEADERSHIP, MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE

The leadership and management of the school are outstanding. Senior managers have an excellent understanding of the current independent school standards and ensure the school meets all of these very well. Led by the headmaster, they have helped to create a highly effective ethos of continuous improvement, founded on providing an education of the highest quality in a supportive learning community, where pupils feel highly valued and respond very well to the high expectations of them in all respects. Senior managers know the strengths and areas for development of the school very well. The improvement and strategic plans are detailed and perceptive documents, which provide rigorous analysis and effective planning for future development, with clear tasks delineated and time constrained in terms of achievement.

The manner in which the school has managed its significant increase in size and the addition of an extra year group, whilst maintaining its strong sense of community and its very high standards of education, is a tribute to the excellence of the senior leadership team led by the headmaster. The school has been very successful in recruiting staff of a high quality, and then imbuing in them the ethos and purpose of the school, so that they have quickly become valued and valuable members of staff.

The close monitoring of teaching, learning and pupils' achievement is an important feature of the work of senior and middle managers, combined with a strong commitment to improvement through continuous professional development and performance management. These factors have allowed senior managers to identify very quickly any areas for development in staff and any decline in the performance of pupils, and address these quickly and effectively.

The premises and accommodation are well maintained and used very effectively, so that they make a valuable contribution to the quality of pupils' education. This quality is enhanced by the lively display in classrooms and around the school, which celebrates pupils' achievement and informs and educates them. In some classrooms the display creates a very attractive, vibrant learning environment for pupils.

Parents are kept very well informed about their children's progress and well-being through reports and parents' evenings and through staff engaging parents in an ongoing dialogue about these. Parents are kept well informed about the various activities in the school and are surveyed regularly for their opinions, with these being considered carefully by the school. Parents expressed great satisfaction with their children's education in the parental questionnaires completed before the inspection. There have been no formal complaints in the last year. Informal complaints are recorded and responded to promptly and effectively, with appropriate records of these being kept.

Governance

The governance of the school is excellent and Cognita has established a very rigorous system in order to ensure full compliance with all the regulatory requirements. The assistant director of education, appointed by Cognita to monitor and support leadership and management in the schools under her charge, provides careful oversight of all aspects of the school's provision and, as a highly experienced and successful professional in her own right, can provide helpful guidance and support to the school through professional dialogue with the senior managers, particularly the headmaster. In turn, the role of the assistant director of education is monitored and supported by a highly experienced independent educational professional, one of a group carrying out this role for schools owned by Cognita, but not on their payroll. The various strategies enumerated above help to ensure that Cognita monitors all aspects of the school closely and provides dispassionate professional support to its senior managers.

SCHOOL DETAILS

Name of school:	North Bridge House Prep School			
Address of school:	1 Gloucester Avenue Camden Town London NW1 7AB			
Telephone number:	0207 267 6266			
Email address:	prep@northbridgehouse.com brodie.bibby@northbridgehouse.com			
Web address	www.northbridgehouse.com			
Proprietor:	Cognita Ltd			
Person registered with DfE as proprietor under paragraph 20 of Part 4:	N/A			
Head Teacher:	Mr Brodie Bibby			
DfE Number	202/6400			
Type of school	Independent school			
Annual fees	£16,512			
Age range of pupils	7-13 years			
Gender of pupils	Boys and girls			
Total number on roll	full-time	486	part-time	0
Number of compulsory school age pupils	Boys:	313	Girls:	173
Number of pupils with statements of special educational need	Boys:	0	Girls:	0
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	Boys:	120	Girls:	61
Type of inspection	Section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008			

This report has been prepared by the School Inspection Service, which provides independent professional inspection of all schools affiliated to the Focus Learning Trust, and members of the Steiner Waldorf Schools Fellowship or Cognita group. The report is available from the School Inspection Service website:
www.schoolinspectionsservice.co.uk.