



SCHOOL INSPECTION SERVICE

INSPECTION REPORT FOR NORTH BRIDGE HOUSE PRE-PREPARATORY SCHOOL

DfE No: 202/6174

The key inspection judgements for this school are:

The quality of education	Requires improvement	3
Pupils' personal development	Good	2
Safeguarding pupils' welfare health and safety	Outstanding	1
Leadership, management and governance	Good	2

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: 24-26th February 2016

SECTION A: SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS

Leadership and management of the school are good. The recently appointed headteacher provides determined and effective leadership at North Bridge House Pre-Preparatory School. She has implemented rigorous systems for ensuring staff are accountable for their performance and has secured confidence within the parent body. At the time of the inspection this work had not yet had sufficient impact and the quality of education requires improvement. Pupils make adequate progress in their learning, although the teaching does not expect enough of those who are more able. Teachers are not assessing pupils' learning sufficiently regularly or robustly. Consequently too often lessons are not always matched to the needs of all pupils. Pupils' achievements in English, computing, art and music are above average by the time they leave the school. The curriculum and teaching are stronger in these subjects. Achievement in mathematics requires improvement because the teachers do not have good subject knowledge and the range of experiences in mathematics is too narrowly focussed on calculation. There is insufficient guidance for teachers on how to further enrich personal and social education lessons. Leaders and the board's managers are well aware of the shortcomings in the quality of education and effective steps have been taken to address these weaknesses.

The curriculum supports pupils' good personal development, and pupils' behaviour is exemplary. The arrangements for safeguarding pupils' welfare, health and safety are outstanding. Procedures in place to check on the suitability of staff, and the implementation of child protection procedures are thorough, and safeguarding is at the heart of the school's daily routines. Those responsible for child protection and the protection of pupils from the risks of extremism regularly update their training and keep all staff alert to all signs of abuse. The Head Teacher is an excellent communicator and takes decisive action to improve the learning and wellbeing of pupils. The capacity of other leaders to play a significant role in school improvement is limited by a shortage of professional development in recent years. This is being arranged in partnership with other North Bridge House schools. Despite the need for improvement, the school meets all the requirements of the independent school standards.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT:

Whilst not required by the regulations, the proprietor should:

- improve the quality of teaching by ensuring that teachers plan work that is aimed at enhancing individuals' skills and knowledge so all pupils can make better progress in English and mathematics lessons;
- improve arrangements for assessing pupils' learning, both in lessons and over time, so teachers have the information they need to adjust the work that is planned for pupils;

- improve teachers' subject knowledge of the mathematics curriculum so they can teach exciting and challenging lessons that help pupils deepen their knowledge and develop their mathematical reasoning skills;
- improve the guidance offered to teachers when teaching personal, social and health education so that the content of these lessons is enriched; and
- develop the skills of all leaders so they can work with staff to identify where practice needs to improve rapidly.

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 17 lessons across a range of subjects. The majority of these were jointly observed with either the headteacher or deputy headteacher. Examples of pupils' work were examined and assessment information was analysed. Discussions were held with members of staff, the headteacher and the Assistant Director of Education for Cognita schools. Inspectors spoke formally and during lessons with groups of pupils about their work and their well-being. A small group of pupils was heard to read. Inspectors observed the life of the school including break times, lunchtime and assemblies. They analysed the school website and other documentation and records. The 111 parental responses to the pre-inspection questionnaires were taken into account.

Reporting Inspector:	Mr Jonathan Palk
Team inspectors:	Mr Peter Jones

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL:

North Bridge House Pre-Preparatory School is an independent co-educational day school for pupils aged five to seven years. The school was opened in 1938 and is based in an adapted large detached house in Hampstead. It is one of five schools in the North Bridge House School group that are owned and run by Cognita Ltd. Currently there are 210 pupils on roll organised into 11 single-aged classes. Pupils who attend represent a diverse range of ethnic backgrounds. A small number of pupils has English as an additional language; very few pupils are at an early stage of learning English. There are a few pupils identified as having special educational needs or disabilities; but no pupil has a statement of special educational need. The Cognita group provides support and direction for the school's management and development. Since the last inspection in 2010 there have been two changes of headteacher. The current headteacher joined the school in August 2015 as interim headteacher and was appointed as substantive headteacher in November 2015.

SECTION C: THE INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

1. THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The quality of education provided by the school requires improvement.

Pupils' learning and achievement

Pupils' learning and achievement require improvement. In the main, attainment on entry is above that of most five year olds in reading and writing. Lessons and a scrutiny of work show this standard is maintained. Pupils write legibly and with good imagination. Punctuation is generally accurate. Pupils engage quickly with ideas in the story books they share and are adept at creating their own stories. Written work in science and topic books does not reflect this above average standard. Grammar skills are acquired as appropriate but in general those who start the year with attainment below that of the class group do not close the gap quickly enough and those who are above average could achieve more. This is due to teachers' tendency to limit expectations of what pupils can attain in their written work.

Attainment in mathematics is broadly average on entry. Progress is uneven across the range of mathematical topics. This is largely because teachers do not plan enough lessons that link mathematical ideas and concepts to each other. Investigative and problem-solving work is insufficiently provided in mathematics lessons to help pupils apply and deepen their understanding. The headteacher has recently invested in alternative curriculum guidance for staff to assist lesson planning but teachers are not adjusting this to meet the needs of all their pupils.

Amongst the other subjects, standards in music, computing and art are notable strengths. This reflects the good subject knowledge of these teachers who successfully stretch and develop all pupils according to their abilities.

Pupils with special educational needs or disabilities receive effective additional support in class and during one-to-one lessons. There is good specialist help for those who have difficulty with speech and language or mobility. This is helping these pupils make good progress against their personal targets.

The quality of the curriculum

This area requires improvement. The curriculum provides a National Curriculum experience that prepares pupils well for the 7+ entrance examinations to local independent schools. Provision for subjects such as art, music, physical education and computing together with local visits, significantly enhance the educational experiences of pupils. The very broad-ranging extra-curricular programme in which the majority of pupils take part contributes to a rich, rounded educational experience.

The teaching of phonics, particularly in Year 1, does not discriminate between those who have mastered the particular phase and those that have not. There is an inconsistent approach to teaching phonics within the year group that leads to

uneven progress in pupils' phonic knowledge. The curriculum is not planned to take account of the needs of pupils learning English as an additional language and this limits their progress.

The mathematics curriculum lacks opportunity for pupils to deepen their understanding through investigative and problem-solving activities.

The school has good procedures for supporting pupils with special educational needs and disabilities. Diagnostic evaluation clearly identifies particular learning needs. The two special education needs teachers work closely with other teachers to provide individual support; this effectively helps most pupils to access the curriculum and make progress in their learning.

The quality of teaching and assessment

Teaching and assessment both require improvement. Weekly lesson planning is shared across each year group but teachers do not adjust these plans effectively to reflect the skills and abilities of all the pupils in their class. Too frequently all pupils are set the same work with the same expectations, resulting in more able pupils becoming bored and finding the demands of the lesson too easy. Sometimes where the lesson made higher demands this was often confusing to the less able pupils who struggled without effective support.

The teachers who have good subject knowledge in English and the specialist teachers make appropriate adjustments for individual abilities within lesson planning. Here, pupils' progress is good. On these occasions pupils learn well because the work meets their needs and the teachers are competent at taking individuals further to develop and consolidate their skills. Frequently in the mathematics lessons observed teachers did not show that they had sufficient subject expertise to modify and adjust their teaching.

Opportunities for pupils to talk about their understanding are infrequent. This limits pupils' ability to make sense of new ideas or concepts. It also limits teachers' opportunity to assess how well pupils understand the lesson. Where teachers encouraged discussion, learning was significantly improved as in a lesson writing a story about Alice's visit to the pre-prep school. The teacher led a lively discussion that drew out the characteristics of Alice and how she might behave. The teacher used pupils' eager responses to help shape an exemplary piece of writing. This gave pupils a clear focus for their own writing, and combined with some clear individual targets resulted in excellent progress.

Assessment of pupils' progress and attainment is currently being developed as the school responds to the requirements of the National Curriculum. The school retains a baseline of pupils' attainment using the old National Curriculum levels, but is moving over to assessing pupils with age-related expectations. The headteacher has introduced a system for regularly checking up on pupils' progress that reviews pupils' achievements against end of year expectations. At present this is limited to English and mathematics. Not all the teachers are using the information they have gained from these assessments to adjust the objectives they have for different ability groups in their class. Often more able pupils have to

complete the easier tasks before they can move on to what is perceived as harder work. In some cases this 'harder' work is not deepening pupils' understanding.

Teachers provide helpful feedback when marking pupils' written work. Comments made by teachers help the pupils to identify how they can improve their work and offer targets to help pupils attain that improvement. This level of marking has not been embedded across all subjects.

The learning plans for pupils with special educational needs or disabilities are of good quality. These identify the next steps to help pupils close gaps in their learning and attain the level of their peer group. However, the timescales to attain these targets are too long to ensure gaps are closed rapidly. The special educational needs teachers are providing effective support for pupils in one-to-one environments and this helps pupils keep up with classmates. Teaching assistants are diligent in following these special educational needs learning plans in lessons and helping identified pupils complete their work. Class teachers are not reviewing the learning plan targets which appear infrequently on lesson plans. This adds to the weaknesses in daily lesson planning that insufficiently address individual needs. For example, reference is made to the use of practical materials in mathematics lessons, but there was very little evidence of practical resources available to support pupils in lessons.

2. THE QUALITY OF PUPILS' PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

The quality of pupils' personal development is good. British democratic values are integral to the school's approach in developing positive attitudes and behaviour and are a reflection of the school's aims. Pupils show good awareness of democracy and have taken part in mock elections and in voting for School Council members. The school ensures when appropriate, that pupils receive a balanced presentation of opposing views and that the promotion of partisan political views is precluded from any aspect of teaching or in the life of the school.

Behaviour during inspection was exemplary. Pupils consistently show respect and tolerance for each other and for their teachers, and are aware of the importance of the roles of different faiths within modern British society. The school reinforces and extends the strong moral code that pupils bring with them. Pupils know right from wrong.

Personal, social and health and economic education is strong and underpins pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. It is delivered through a comprehensive curriculum that covers topics that are relevant to pupils growing up in a multi-cultural community. There is however, insufficient guidance in the personal social and health education lessons to help teachers deepen the pupils' development of themes and topics.

Pupils have a good awareness of other faiths and beliefs. The wide range of cultural backgrounds of the pupils' families encourages understanding, tolerance and appreciation of their own and other cultures in Britain, as for example when they learn about the celebration of Christmas, Divali and Hanukkah. Pupils know about public institutions and services in England, although teaching of this dimension is not as well structured as other aspects of personal, social, health and economic education.

Pupils are willing to show initiative, for example in their participation in the School Council. They enjoy arranging fundraising events and they support local charities as well as national initiatives. Opportunities for pupils to develop an awareness of and involvement in the Africa village aid project have been developed further since the last inspection.

3. SAFEGUARDING PUPILS' WELFARE, HEALTH AND SAFETY

The school's provision for safeguarding pupils' welfare, health and safety is outstanding. The culture and curriculum within the school support all aspects of the school's safeguarding procedures. Safeguarding procedures and policies are excellent. The school has a clear safeguarding policy which meets requirements, is well understood by staff and is implemented effectively. It is fully up to date and reflects the new duties expressed in the July revision to *Keeping Children Safe in Education 2015*, which covers radicalisation and extremism, female genital mutilation (FGM), and children missing from education. There is a well-trained safeguarding team whose members understand their responsibilities and carry them out effectively. The managers ensure that all policies connected with safeguarding, child protection and *Prevent*, including staff training, are thorough, reviewed regularly and kept fully up to date. Staff receive regular updates to ensure their knowledge remains current. They consider they are well supported in implementing their responsibilities to keep pupils safe.

Rigorous checks are made on all those employed at the school and all visitors. The building is secure and children are safe. Pupils are well aware of their wider duties to keep each other safe. Regular updates in assemblies and during personal and social education lessons enhance this awareness. The teacher responsible for ICT is fully committed to ensuring that pupils understand their responsibilities when using any electronic devices. Parents are offered their own training and advice on how to help monitor their children's use.

The school premises are maintained to a high standard. Despite the numerous stairs and corridors there are no obstructions or hazards. Pupils look after the building which is augmented by the attractive displays of their artwork and ceramics. The outdoor play area is similarly well maintained by staff. It is safe, devoid of any litter and well supplied with interesting equipment that engages and keeps pupils happily playing at break times.

The school has a very effective behaviour policy which is implemented successfully. Pupils say they feel very safe in school and that there are lots of adults who would help them if they had a problem. If a pupil is being less than

considerate towards a peer a gentle reminder is usually all that is needed to restore harmony.

All regulations are met. The school leadership, along with the owners have ensured compliance in all respects. Fire drills are undertaken regularly and the knowledgeable and committed premises manager is diligent in responding to any perceived risks. Documents are thorough and detailed. All staff are trained as fire wardens. Procedures for first aid are all in place, and very well organized. Supervision is thorough. Attendance and the admissions register all meet regulations.

4. LEADERSHIP, MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE

The quality and effectiveness of leadership and management is good. The headteacher is dynamic, determined and clear-sighted. She has high expectations of what all pupils can achieve. She is well aware of the weaknesses in teaching, curriculum and assessment and is very well supported by Cognita advisers in pursuing her vision for improvement.

The headteacher has gained the trust and confidence of parents. Her early actions to put the school back on course following a period of complacency have earned her considerable respect from staff and parents. The proportion of parents responding to the pre-inspection questionnaire was high and parents were largely unanimous in their positive views about her leadership. This is a very different picture from the parents' views less than a year ago.

Confidence in her leadership is shared by the inspectors. There is a clear strategy for school improvement that focuses on the issues identified as causing concern. . The headteacher has grasped the nettle of managing the performance of teachers. She has high expectations of her staff and these are defined through the performance management process and the revised job descriptions.

The headteacher is ably supported by the deputy headteacher who has been responsible for overseeing the review and implementation of safeguarding and welfare provision. At this stage oversight of the quality of daily planning and the teaching in classes is too casual to bring about immediate improvement. Minutes of year group team meetings concern themselves more with daily management than with improving teaching and assessment. There is little regular oversight of daily planning to ensure this is meeting the needs of individuals.

The headteacher has made a start on strengthening summative assessment with a skills checklist for English and mathematics. There is more guidance than previously for teachers on how to improve their practice. The headteacher has enlisted the support of the prep school in this matter. It is too early to assess the impact of this support.

The school meets the Independent School Standards for premises and accommodation, information to parents and handling complaints. The school's relationships with parents and the wider community are highly effective.

Governance

The quality and effectiveness of governance are good. The causes of decline in provision have been identified extremely well and the proprietors have taken robust and strong action to support the school. Professional development for staff that seeks to draw on the best examples of practice across the group of schools is in place, and staff have responded positively to this. The proprietors are well informed about the requirements of Independent School Standards and have ensured that they are met. 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.

SCHOOL DETAILS

Name of school:	North Bridge House Pre-Prep School			
Address of school:	8 Netherhall Gardens Hampstead NW3 5RR			
Telephone number:	0207 267 6266 (option 2)			
Email address:	preprep@northbridgehouse.com			
Web address	www.northbridghouse.com			
Proprietor:	Cognita			
Person registered with DfE as proprietor under paragraph 20 of Part 4:	Chris Jansen			
Head Teacher:	Mrs Christine McLelland			
Deputy Head	Mrs Michelle Mitchell			
DfE Number	202/6174			
Type of school	Independent pre-preparatory school			
Annual fees	£15,285			
Age range of pupils	5 – 7 years			
Gender of pupils	Mixed			
Total number on roll	full-time	210	part-time	N/A
Number of children under-5	Boys:	0	Girls:	0
Number of compulsory school age pupils	Boys:	122	Girls:	88
Number of post-compulsory pupils	Boys:	0	Girls:	0
Number of pupils with statements of special educational need	Boys:	0	Girls:	0
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	Boys:	7	Girls:	6
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.