

# St Nicholas Preparatory School

Independent school light-touch inspection report

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Reporting inspector	Mark Lindfield HMI

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## Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out by Ofsted under Section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.<sup>1, 2</sup>

The inspection of registered provision was conducted under Section 49(2) of the Childcare Act 2006.<sup>3, 4</sup>

This was a light-touch educational inspection which focused principally on: the quality of education provided by the school; its provision for the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development; the arrangements for safeguarding pupils and the improvements the school has made since its last inspection.

## Information about the school

St Nicholas Preparatory School was started in 1998 when The Montessori St Nicholas Charity formed a joint venture with Asquith Court Schools, who have now been replaced by Cognita Schools Ltd. It is situated in Westminster, in London, occupying two listed buildings at 23 and 24 Prince's Gate. This co-educational preparatory school for children aged from two years and nine months to eleven years has 283 children on roll, with 32 children under the age of five attending part time. The school provides for 102 children to attend part time in the Early Years Foundation Stage. These include eight children under three years of age and together with children under four they attend one of the three Nursery classes; children aged four or five attend one of the three Reception classes. Seventy-one children attending are in receipt of government nursery funded education. The majority of the children are bilingual, from an international community and with a large proportion speaking French as their main language. A small proportion of pupils have special educational needs, there are currently no children registered as having statements of special educational needs.

The school aims 'to promote a rich and varied education in which all children are valued equally and encouraged to fulfil their potential'. The school motto is: 'Be happy in order to learn.'

The school was last inspected in January 2008. The present headteacher was appointed in September 2010.

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<sup>1</sup> [www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2002/ukpga\\_20020032\\_en\\_14#pt10-ch1-pb4-l1g162](http://www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2002/ukpga_20020032_en_14#pt10-ch1-pb4-l1g162)

<sup>2</sup> [www.opsi.gov.uk/ACTS/acts2005/ukpga\\_20050018\\_en\\_15#sch8](http://www.opsi.gov.uk/ACTS/acts2005/ukpga_20050018_en_15#sch8)

<sup>3</sup> Schools which provide childcare for children from birth until the term in which they reach their third birthday must register this provision separately with Ofsted.

<sup>4</sup> [www.opsi.gov.uk/ACTS/acts2006/ukpga\\_20060021\\_en\\_4#pt3-ch2-pb4-l1g49](http://www.opsi.gov.uk/ACTS/acts2006/ukpga_20060021_en_4#pt3-ch2-pb4-l1g49)

## Evaluation of the school

St Nicholas Preparatory School provides a good overall quality of education and provides an outstanding quality of curriculum. Teachers build good relationships with all the pupils regardless of their previous education experiences or backgrounds and, as a result, the school environment is friendly and welcoming; children's behaviour is good throughout the school and they are polite and courteous. The safeguarding, welfare, health and safety of pupils are inadequate because the school's recruitment procedures to check the suitability of all staff prior to them starting work do not meet all requirements. Since the last inspection the school has improved its facilities for pupils who are ill and children in the Early Years Foundation Stage are provided with increased opportunities to participate in independent learning; a number of written comments in the parental questionnaires recognise the positive impact that the recently appointed headteacher has made on the school. The school meets the majority of the regulations for independent schools and successfully meets its aims.

### Quality of education

The curriculum provided in the main school is outstanding. It is underpinned by the National Curriculum and in addition pupils are given the option of studying the French distance learning programme (Centre of National d'enseignement a distance – CNED). It is further strongly enhanced by an extensive range of after-school clubs with pupils enjoying frequent opportunities to participate in regular trips and visits, such as to local museums. Specialist teachers with good subject knowledge convey their enthusiasm to pupils who respond with very positive attitudes in lessons. Children spoke eagerly of their enjoyment of a wide range of subjects and clubs and benefit from the well-resourced specialist teaching areas for science, art and information and communication technology (ICT). In addition, good use is made of local facilities to encourage children's swimming skills and physical development. The curriculum for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage is good and adults' good knowledge of the learning and development requirements promotes children's learning.

Lesson planning is very detailed across the school and draws clearly on well-structured schemes of work in all subjects. This helps to ensure that pupils' routes of progression in their learning are very clear and that they make good progress during their time at the school. Teachers get to know children well and their support and encouragement during lessons ensure good progress is made by pupils of all abilities. The school places a strong emphasis on helping pupils to become well-rounded individuals, for example developing their speaking and listening skills through regular drama and performances. While rehearsing for the school's end of term performance pupils spoke clearly and with good expression. The majority of pupils are highly articulate and confident speakers in more than one language because this is strongly encouraged from the moment they arrive in the school.

Teaching and assessment are good. Through their use of humour, praise and encouragement, teachers build good relationships with pupils from the earliest age. Teaching is conducted at a lively pace and pupils are regularly challenged to produce their best work. Teachers organise lessons well and use a range of teaching strategies to maintain pupils' interest. In a French lesson, pupils made good progress because they were expected to listen to praise and instructions, recite numbers and practise their speaking skills in small groups. This is a common feature in many good lessons where pairs of children are given opportunities to share and discuss their ideas. Occasionally teachers miss opportunities to develop links with other subjects, for example, when missing opportunities to build pupils' mathematical skills through organising, representing and interpreting data from pupils' scientific investigations.

Specialist teachers' enthusiasm and good subject knowledge are transmitted to pupils, who respond positively. For instance, pupils in the library listened intently to an adult reading a story and they were encouraged to contribute their ideas and explain events as they unfolded. In an outstanding English lesson the teacher carefully identified which sounds pupils were finding difficult and gave them clear messages on how to improve. The majority of teaching is good or better and in these lessons assessment is used effectively to modify and adapt planning to match pupils' learning; however, this is not consistent practice across the school. The school is using pupil tracking data increasingly effectively to monitor the progress of all children and this has led to the introduction of targets for individual pupils in English and mathematics.

## **Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils**

The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils is good. Pupils clearly enjoy school and find the lessons enjoyable and fun so that their attendance is good. Through the well-planned and resourced lessons in English, French, ICT, science and mathematics, pupils acquire a good range of basic skills. In addition they show good speaking and listening skills so that they are well prepared for the next stage in their education.

The school recognises the importance of pupils' different religious and cultural backgrounds. Pupils study the main religions of the world and have regular personal, social and health education. Pupils are drawn from a wide range of cultural backgrounds and many have an exceptionally well-developed knowledge of the wider world. The high number of trips and a broad range of visitors to the school ensure that pupils have a broad understanding of English public bodies and institutions. They show good care and consideration for each other and work well together in lessons, talking easily and discussing their ideas effectively. Positive relationships between staff and pupils create a welcoming and harmonious *entente cordiale* in the school community.

Pupils develop into kind and mature individuals with a strong sense of morality and consideration for others. Their behaviour is good and they are keen to contribute to

school life and are proud of their roles in the school council, as team captains or in other positions of responsibility. Pupils contribute to the wider community by taking part in a range of fund-raising activities and in their musical and dramatic performances.

## **Safeguarding pupils' welfare, health and safety**

The school's arrangements to ensure the welfare, health and safety of pupils are inadequate. The new headteacher has quickly developed a more rigorous approach to safeguarding children, for example in strengthening child protection training arrangements for staff in line with the school's child protection policy. However, there are still a few remaining weaknesses in the school's staff recruitment arrangements. Where members of staff have previously lived abroad, the school has not completed appropriate further checks to ensure their suitability to work with children. On the occasions where the school employs supply staff to cover for absent teaching staff, all necessary checks are completed. However, these checks are not recorded sufficiently carefully to meet the regulations.

The school has good awareness of disability and fulfils its obligations under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, as amended. Since the previous inspection the school has improved facilities for pupils who are ill and increased accessibility to a ground floor washroom. All staff receive appropriate child protection training and are aware of their responsibilities. Staff have completed first-aid training and the required numbers of staff in the Early Years Foundation Stage have completed paediatric training. The school was able to provide evidence to show that it has completed checks on fire safety equipment, held fire drills and conducted fire safety assessments.

Staff show care and concern for the pupils and they take time to listen to their concerns and to share in their enjoyment and enthusiasm for school. Praise and encouragement are regular features in lessons and pupils respond well, showing positive attitudes. Pupils learn how to keep themselves healthy and show good understanding of healthy lifestyles in their selection of healthy snacks and their involvement in physical exercise. They learn how to keep safe from cyber bullying and they report that bullying is a rare occurrence and that they know where to go to find help and support if necessary.

## **Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage**

The overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage is good and the under-threes provision meets the requirements of the early years register. Outcomes for children are good because they make good progress from the time they arrive. They make particularly good progress in their communication and language skills and from an early age share their thoughts with adults. Children's behaviour is outstanding and they make good progress in developing their independence. Since the last inspection staff have increased opportunities for children to choose from the range of

activities independent of adults. Children under three-years-old as well as children in the Nursery and Reception classes show good enjoyment. Children in Reception clearly enjoyed designing and making bird feeders and placing them in the outdoor area.

The quality of provision is good. Planning is effective; teachers use a consistent and effective lesson planning format with clear learning objectives. The overall quality of teaching is good throughout the Early Years Foundation Stage. Classrooms are well appointed, equipped and maintained and present safe learning environments. There are missed opportunities during some lessons to record key observations and evaluate children's progress.

Leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage are good; they have a strong commitment to improvement and have acted effectively on the recommendations of the previous inspection. Safeguarding and welfare arrangements comply with regulations. The school has formed excellent partnerships with external advisors to improve the provision and works closely with parents and carers to discuss their child's learning and progress. Although assessments are regularly completed for individual children, this information is not used consistently to monitor and evaluate the progress of different groups of pupils across the Early Years Foundation Stage.

## **Compliance with regulatory requirements**

The proprietor has ensured that the school meets The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010, schedule 1 ('the Regulations'), with the exception of those listed below.<sup>5</sup>

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of provision for welfare, health and safety of pupils (standards in part 3) and must:

- ensure that arrangements made to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils have regard to guidance issued by the Secretary of State (paragraph 7).

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of staff, supply staff and proprietors (standards in part 4) and must:

- ensure that checks are completed where staff have lived abroad and where the Criminal Records Bureau checks are not sufficient to establish the suitability of staff to work in a school (paragraph 19(2)(d))
- ensure that the single central register shows that written notification has been received from the employment business that checks have been completed on supply staff, together with the date that written notification was received and each check made (paragraph 22(5)).

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<sup>5</sup> [www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2010/1997/contents/made](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2010/1997/contents/made)

## What the school could do to improve further

While not required by regulations, the school might wish to consider the following points for development.

- Use assessment consistently across the school to ensure pupils' understanding in lessons and to adapt planning to meet the needs of pupils of all abilities.
- Develop links with other subjects to increase opportunities for pupils to apply their mathematical skills.

Early Years Foundation Stage.

- Increase opportunities during lessons for staff to make observations and assessments of children's progress.
- Improve the monitoring and evaluation of the progress of different groups of pupils across the Early Years Foundation Stage through making better use of the available information and data.



## Inspection judgements

Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
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### The quality of education

Overall quality of education		√		
How well the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of pupils	√			
How effective teaching and assessment are in meeting the full range of pupils' needs		√		
How well pupils make progress in their learning		√		

### Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

Quality of provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development		√		
The behaviour of pupils		√		

### Welfare, health and safety of pupils

The overall welfare, health and safety of pupils				√
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### The quality of the Early Years Foundation Stage provision

Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage		√		
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage		√		
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage		√		
Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage		√		

## School details

<b>School status</b>	Independent		
<b>Type of school</b>	Preparatory		
<b>Date school opened</b>	1998		
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	2–11		
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed		
<b>Number on roll (full-time pupils)</b>	Boys: 114	Girls: 137	Total: 251
<b>Number on roll (part-time pupils)</b>	Boys: 18	Girls: 16	Total: 32
<b>Number of children aged 0–3 in registered childcare provision</b>	Boys: 7	Girls: 1	Total: 8
<b>Number of pupils with a statement of special educational needs</b>	Boys: 0	Girls: 0	Total: 0
<b>Annual fees (day pupils)</b>	£8,175–£13,110		
<b>Address of school</b>	23–24 Princes Gate, London SW7 1PT		
<b>Telephone number</b>	020 7225 1277		
<b>Email address</b>	<a href="mailto:info@stnicholasprep.co.uk">info@stnicholasprep.co.uk</a>		
<b>Headteacher</b>	Ms Jill Aister		
<b>Proprietor</b>	Cognita Schools Ltd		