

North Bridge House School – Junior Department

Independent School

Inspection report

DfES Registration Number	202/6174
Unique Reference Number	100068
Inspection number	302946
Inspection dates	21-22 March 2007
Reporting inspector	Bradley Simmons HMI

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 162A of the Education Act 2002 (as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005).

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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, in order to advise the Secretary of State for Education and Skills about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

Information about the school

North Bridge House School, junior department, is an independent pre-preparatory school for boys and girls aged between five and eight years. There are 194 pupils on roll. The school was opened in 1939. Its partner nursery and senior departments are situated on other sites locally. The school comprises 14 classes, spanning Year 1 to Year 3. Three of the school's Year 1 classes are accommodated within the nursery building on another site.

The school aims 'to provide a stimulating, happy and secure environment in which each child is treated as an individual'. It seeks 'to help every child fulfil his or her academic potential through dedicated and enthusiastic teaching'.

Evaluation of the school

Parents are overwhelmingly positive about this school, and rightly so. It is a good school which meets its aims. During their three years in the junior department of North Bridge House, pupils receive good teaching and therefore make good progress, attaining high standards by the time they leave. The dedication and commitment of the headteacher result in a school which constantly seeks improvement for its pupils. The quality of care for pupils is good and the school meets the vast majority of the regulations.

Quality of education

The curriculum is good. It is broad, generally well balanced and is one of the key factors underpinning the good progress made by pupils as they move through the school. It comprises all subjects of the National Curriculum and religious education. Throughout the school, there is an effective emphasis on ensuring that pupils speak clearly, using standard English. There is particularly good curricular provision in physical education (PE), music and French. A small number of parents expressed concern that their children are not physically active enough at school, but this concern is unfounded. Parents are right, however, to note that there is a comparative weakness in the provision for

information and communication technology (ICT) because resources, although just adequate, are limited. The school has plans to address this issue.

There is some unnecessary difference in the balance of planned activities between classes in the same year groups. This results in varying emphases on different aspects of the curriculum, such as silent reading, for some classes in the same year group.

Personal, social and health education and citizenship activities support the pupils' personal development. However, these are not organised into a written scheme of work so teachers are not able to ensure that pupils' knowledge and understanding are systematically developed.

Pupils with learning difficulties make good progress. The learning support teacher makes an early diagnosis of their problems and devises individual programmes of learning that largely meet their needs. However, some targets within these programmes are not sharp enough to ensure that other teachers know exactly which elements of each pupil's performance they should be assessing and extending. There are good arrangements in place to support pupils who speak English as an additional language and they are quickly enabled to participate fully in the work and life of the school.

A very small number of parents are concerned that opportunities for extra-curricular activities and creativity are limited. Inspectors disagree and judge that there is a good range of visits, visitors, extra-curricular activities and themed weeks or days that take place throughout the year. Pupils' enjoyment and interests are considered fully in planning different aspects of the curriculum and pupils confirm that they enjoy learning and find the curriculum interesting.

Almost without exception, parents believe that teaching at this school is good, and they are right. Individual examples were seen of outstanding teaching. Such lessons are so successful because teachers plan effectively to meet the needs of all ability levels, ensure that questioning extends pupils' learning and have very high expectations of the amount and quality of work that individuals must produce. In addition, these teachers use humour effectively to motivate and inspire, demonstrate very clearly methods by which pupils can improve their work and encourage pupils to think for themselves. Classroom routines are strong so very little time is wasted, and the few boisterous boys are quickly checked and re-focused on their work.

In some lessons teaching was satisfactory. This was because teachers' expectations of the amount and quality of work to be produced by pupils were not as high as in other classes. To take an example, in one classroom handwriting is tidy and letters are well formed whilst in another class of similar aged pupils, handwriting is all these things, but it is joined as well.

Teachers set individual targets for pupils in English and mathematics, which help pupils improve aspects of their work. The best marking also clarifies the next steps in learning but such practice is not uniform within each class or across the school. The school maintains comprehensive records on individual pupils, but teachers do not always use these effectively to build on the identified gaps in each pupil's reading, writing and mathematical skills.

When pupils join the school, their attainment is well above that normally expected for pupils of their age. Good teaching leads to pupils making at least good progress across a full range of subjects during the time they are at the school and attaining high standards by the time they move to the senior department. Progress over time in music, French and PE is particularly strong.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are good. The majority of pupils have a good level of self-awareness. They appreciate their own successes and those of other pupils, and spontaneously applaud achievement. Pupils confirm that they enjoy school and learning; their attendance is good. They are confident young people. There is a high emphasis on valuing the individual and on ensuring that all are fully included in the life of the school.

Most pupils develop a strong moral code and are generally able to moderate their own behaviour because they are taught the difference between right and wrong. Behaviour is generally good, but a few boys are occasionally boisterous or arrogant. Teachers and other adults show respect for pupils, which in turn promotes a similar response from pupils.

The cultural awareness of pupils is excellent and is heightened by visits to London museums, and galleries, and by taking part in school musical productions. Pupils come from a range of different cultural backgrounds. They mix well with each other and value the cultural diversity within the school.

Pupils contribute well to the school and wider community. All age groups take part in school productions and there are opportunities for older pupils to take on responsibilities which support the smooth running of the school. Pupils play an active role in supporting the wider community through charity work. The school capitalises on its links with a Kenyan school by extending pupils' cultural, geographic and economic understanding.

Welfare, health and safety of the pupils

The school shows a good level of care for all pupils. It encourages pupils to develop a good awareness of healthy lifestyles. Balanced and tasty school meals, combined with study in the classroom, effectively raise pupils' awareness of good diet. There are outstanding opportunities to achieve and maintain physical fitness, including PE lessons in which pupils take part in a wide variety of games, swimming during Years 1 and 2, and extra-curricular sporting activities.

Pupils confirm that they feel safe in school. In addition to attendance registers, staff maintain a careful class record of pupils' whereabouts so that they know, for example, if a child is at a piano lesson or has gone to a hospital appointment. This enables staff to check swiftly that all pupils are safe in the event of an emergency.

All procedures to ensure pupils' health and safety are in place. The school carries out thorough risk assessments on all activities that take place in or out of school. Child protection procedures are fully in place and staff have undertaken appropriate training in this area. There is a good level of first aid care; most staff are trained first aiders and there are first aid resources on each floor of the school. Staff show very good awareness of pupils' medical conditions and appropriate precautions are taken to ensure pupils' well-being in this respect.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

The school treats its responsibilities for checking on the suitability of staff very seriously. It has carried out checks with the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) on all members of staff. In addition it has anticipated the requirement to devise a single central record of staff checks. Some of the CRB checks are, however, not at enhanced level. The school has already taken steps to remedy this situation. All other required checks on staff have been assiduously carried out.

School's premises and accommodation

The majority of junior classes are situated in a large Victorian house which originally accommodated all three departments that make up North Bridge House School. Three Year 1 classes are based in the nursery building on another site. Both buildings are well maintained, and have seen significant investment by the current proprietors. A very small minority of parents complain that some classrooms are too small. The school adjusts class sizes to take account of space limitations. Some rooms are small, but none are overcrowded. Pupils benefit from good quality outdoor space with a range of equipment which encourages adventurous play. At present, neither building has a medical room where pupils who fall ill may rest whilst waiting to be collected by parents.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

The school provides a comprehensive range of information for parents, and more is available on request.

A few parents are concerned about the lack of homework in comparison with the amount that they perceive is received by Year 3 pupils in other local independent schools. The school has a clear policy which states that it does not compete with the amount of homework demanded by other schools. There is a progressive increase in the amount of planned homework as the pupils become older. Pupils confirm that this is the case, but they also say that there is a difference in the amount provided in different classes within the same year group. Inspectors agree that such anomalies do exist.

Annual reports are of a satisfactory quality, and give a reasonably clear analysis of pupils' progress and understanding. However, they do not include targets for improvement or information which would allow parents to compare their child's academic performance against national norms. The school recognises that the reporting of annual standardised test scores would increase its accountability to parents and serve to confirm its success in its work.

Procedures for handling complaints

A fairly high proportion of parents do not understand the school's procedures for handling complaints, although many noted that this was because they had no cause to use them. The procedures meet all regulations and are available on request from the school office.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school meets all of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as amended January 2005, with the exception of those listed below.

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of suitability of proprietor and staff (standard 4) and must:

- undertake additional checks with the Criminal Records Bureau on those staff with a standard disclosure, so that all staff employed at the school have enhanced disclosures (paragraph 4(c)).

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of the premises and accommodation (standard 5) and must:

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- provide appropriate facilities for pupils who are ill in accordance with the *Education (School Premises) Regulations 1999* (paragraph 5(l)).

What the school could do to improve further

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

- build consistently on the identified gaps in individual pupils' reading, writing and mathematical skills so that their progress accelerates
- improve the quality of teaching across the school to match that of the best
- improve provision for ICT.

School details

Name of school	North Bridge House School		
DfES number	202/6174		
Unique reference number	100068		
Type of school	Pre-preparatory		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	1939		
Age range of pupils	5 - 8		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 101	Girls: 93	Total: 194
Annual fees (day pupils)	£10,635.00		
Address of school	8 Netherhall Gardens		
	London		
	NW3 5RR		
Telephone number	020 7435 2884		
Email address	junior@northbridgehouseschools.co.uk		
Headteacher	Mrs Robyn Allsopp		
Proprietor	Cognita Ltd		
Reporting inspector	Bradley Simmons HMI		
Dates of inspection	21-22 March 2007		