

School inspection report

24 to 26 June 2025

North Bridge House Nursery and Pre-Prep School

8 Netherhall Gardens

Hampstead

London

NW3 5RR

The Independent Schools Inspectorate is appointed by the Department for Education to inspect association independent schools in England. Our inspections report on the extent to which the statutory Independent School Standards and other applicable regulatory requirements are met, collectively referred to in this report as 'the Standards'.

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Summary of inspection findings

1. The school is a welcoming and happy place that pupils enjoy coming to. It is led effectively by leaders with secure knowledge and understanding of how pupils learn. Leaders place pupils' wellbeing at the heart of their work and all the decisions they make.
2. The proprietor provides leaders with appropriate challenge and support. The proprietor checks all aspects of the school's provision regularly and thoroughly. This enables them to assure themselves that the Standards, and other regulatory requirements, are met fully and consistently.
3. The curriculum has a notable and specific focus on the development of pupils' language skills. Leaders have a clear and appropriate rationale for this. The school has sophisticated systems in place to identify and prioritise pupils' language needs. Leaders put highly effective measures in place to encourage language development. This has a very strong impact on how well pupils learn. Pupils make good progress throughout the school and attain very highly by the time they reach Year 2, including those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and those who speak English as an additional language (EAL). The quality of language provision is a significant strength of the school.
4. Teaching is effective and well matched to pupils' needs. Teachers plan and deliver the curriculum effectively. Good relationships between pupils and staff, interesting lessons and well-chosen resources help pupils to learn well.
5. Early years provision is appropriate and engaging. Staff understand the needs of very young children well. The curriculum is effectively planned and delivered so that it meets children's needs.
6. The curriculum is led by year group leaders, who have responsibility for their particular age phase. This means that no leader has responsibility for how well individual subjects are planned and taught throughout the school, from the youngest children to the oldest pupils. As a result, there are a small number of instances where planning and delivery of the curriculum is less effective than it could be.
7. Personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) is taught effectively. The curriculum includes a wide range of areas that help pupils to develop socially and emotionally. They learn about the diversity in society and the importance of treating everyone with respect. The PSHE curriculum helps pupils to develop their self-confidence and their knowledge about how to keep themselves safe and healthy.
8. Pupils behave well throughout the school. They develop good manners and are kind and respectful to each other. Pupils learn about bullying and know to tell an adult if they are worried about anything. Bullying happens very rarely and there are suitable measures in place in case it does occur.
9. The school has a strong safeguarding culture. Staff are well trained and vigilant. They report any concerns that arise and these are dealt with promptly and effectively. Robust measures are in place to ensure that only suitable people are employed to work at the school.

The extent to which the school meets the Standards

- Standards relating to leadership and management, and governance are met.
- Standards relating to the quality of education, training and recreation are met.
- Standards relating to pupils' physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing are met.
- Standards relating to pupils' social and economic education and contribution to society are met.
- Standards relating to safeguarding are met.

Recommended next steps

Leaders should:

- develop their oversight of individual subjects so that planning and delivery is fully effective in all areas of the curriculum.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

10. Leaders work closely with staff to create a welcoming school that pupils enjoy coming to. Promoting pupils' wellbeing is their highest priority. Until this academic year, the school operated as two schools under a single registration number. Leaders have focused well on bringing the two sites together. The school increasingly operates as a single school with shared values, aims and beliefs. Leaders are knowledgeable and skilled. They understand pupils' needs well, including those of very young children.
11. Leaders regularly evaluate the quality of the school's provision. They consider carefully all aspects of the school to identify what is working well and what could be developed further. This enables leaders to identify the key priorities for school improvement. The development plan is well focused and implemented fully.
12. Governance arrangements are comprehensive and all encompassing. The proprietor has a detailed system of 'professional governance' in place which is well thought through. Through this robust approach, the proprietor regularly checks that the Standards are met consistently. The proprietor provides the school with appropriate challenge and support.
13. Leaders provide parents and others with an appropriate range of useful information, mainly through the school's website. They provide parents with suitable reports showing pupils' attainment and progress in all subjects. These reports provide parents with a rounded view of their child's experiences at school and how well they are doing. The school provides local authorities with all required information concerning pupils who have an education, health and care plan (EHC plan).
14. Leaders and the proprietor keep up to date with changes to legislation and statutory guidance. They ensure that policies are updated to reflect those changes. Policies are shared appropriately with parents and staff. They are implemented consistently throughout the school.
15. Leaders have robust knowledge and understanding about risk assessment. They understand the school's context very well. This helps them to identify risks that are not immediately obvious. Leaders are rigorous in identifying potential risks and they put robust measures in place to mitigate them. The proprietor works closely with leaders to check these measures and assure themselves of their effectiveness and suitability.
16. The school meets its responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010. Leaders have put a suitable accessibility plan in place. It is well focused on physical access to the site, to information and to the curriculum. Leaders promote equality well through the curriculum and how it is taught. This helps pupils to develop an understanding of and appreciation for the diversity in society.
17. Sensitive and political matters are brought to pupils' attention in an age-appropriate and balanced way. Leaders routinely assess any potential visitors to the school to check that their views do not present a risk to pupils. Visitors are supervised appropriately to ensure that no inappropriate information is shared with pupils.
18. Leaders develop effective links and professional relationships with a variety of external agencies to promote pupils' wellbeing. They work with local safeguarding partners, as necessary, to help to keep pupils safe. They liaise with, and act on the advice of, external professionals to support pupils who have SEND and ensure they achieve well.

19. The school has a suitable complaints policy, which allows for concerns to be raised on both an informal and a formal basis. When concerns arise, leaders investigate them thoroughly and within the prescribed timescales. Leaders keep suitably detailed records of complaints and their outcomes.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to leadership and management, and governance

- 20. All the relevant Standards are met.**

Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

21. Leaders deliberately give the curriculum a particularly strong focus on the development of language. Their rationale for this is very clear. First, they understand the crucial nature of this area of development for all pupils. Second, they recognise its importance for the large proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL). Leaders have put sophisticated systems in place for the identification and prioritisation of pupils' needs in this area. Vocabulary, including technical language about individual subjects, is routinely emphasised and taught explicitly throughout the curriculum. Leaders have high expectations of how staff should model language to pupils. Staff live up to these expectations particularly well. Assessment and tracking of children's language development, from the early years onwards, is highly effective. Pupils make notable progress in this area of the curriculum which has a very strong impact on their learning across the board.
22. The curriculum is well planned, carefully considered and closely matched to pupils' needs, aptitudes and ages. In the early years, the curriculum is based on the Early Years Foundation Stage framework. It covers the seven areas of learning, including literacy and mathematics, well. In the rest of the school, the curriculum is based on the national curriculum. Throughout the school, the curriculum is enriched by specialist teaching in music and French. Older pupils also receive specialist teaching in Italian. The curriculum is delivered well. By the time pupils reach the end of Year 2, results of assessments that provide age-standardised scores are very high.
23. The curriculum is led by year group leaders who have responsibility for all the subjects taught in their age phase. There are a small number of examples where the planning and delivery of the curriculum is not as effective as it could be. This is because leaders do not have a complete overview of the quality of the curriculum in individual subjects across the whole school, from the youngest children through to the oldest pupils.
24. Teachers have good knowledge and understanding of the subjects they teach. They plan lessons effectively, having carefully identified the knowledge and skills they want pupils to learn or develop. Teachers share these learning intentions with pupils so that they know what lessons are about and what is expected of them. Teachers explain concepts clearly and address any misunderstandings that occur effectively. They use carefully chosen resources to encourage curiosity and to help pupils to develop their understanding. Respectful relationships between teachers and pupils encourage pupils to behave well so that classrooms provide an environment where pupils learn effectively.
25. In the early years, leaders and staff understand the needs of very young children well. They use this knowledge to help them plan appropriate activities that are well suited to children's developmental stages. The environment is appealing and well planned, providing interesting and engaging spaces in both classrooms and outside areas. Staff support children well across all aspects of their development. By the time they leave the early years, almost all children reach a good level of development.
26. Suitable provision is in place for pupils who have SEND. Leaders closely monitor the quality of provision and the progress pupils make. Leaders and staff know and understand pupils' individual needs well. They put suitable support in place, which is reviewed regularly. They make sure that the curriculum and teaching approaches are adapted appropriately to enable pupils to thrive. As a result, pupils who have SEND make good progress from their starting points.

27. Around two-thirds of pupils speak English as an additional language (EAL). Many join the early years classes speaking little or no English. The school is highly effective in supporting pupils to learn to speak English through, for example, explicit teaching of key vocabulary and the use of visual cues, physical resources and games. Children make very rapid progress and are soon able to communicate with their teachers and friends with ease. Pupils who speak EAL make good progress throughout the school.
28. Assessment practices are well developed on both sites. In the early years, constant ongoing assessment is used to inform teachers' planning. The curriculum is adapted according to children's ages, needs and interests. A similar approach is used in Year 1 and Year 2. Teachers carefully track how well pupils have understood and remembered what they have been taught. They adapt the curriculum, and provide additional support, as necessary, in response to assessments. Teachers provide pupils with useful feedback, both verbally and in writing, which helps them to develop and improve their work.
29. The school provides a range of additional activities that complement the curriculum. Clubs, such as gardening, ukulele, and ballet, are offered daily. Pupils enjoy attending and look forward to their chosen clubs. These help pupils to develop specific skills as well as bolstering their social skills.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to the quality of education, training and recreation.

- 30. All the relevant Standards are met.**

Section 3: Pupils' physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing

31. Throughout the school, pupils are taught to treat other people with courtesy and respect. Leaders and staff show children how to behave respectfully by modelling appropriate ways of communicating both to children and to other adults. Pupils quickly learn to be kind to other people. Staff use well-chosen books to teach pupils about the ways that people can be different to each other, such as their race or religion. They skilfully help pupils to develop an early understanding of the importance of fairness and equality in society.
32. Pupils learn about a range of faiths in their religious education lessons and in assemblies. They learn about how festivals are celebrated and why they are important to people. Pupils are encouraged to consider their own thoughts and beliefs. Stories are used effectively to encourage empathy by, for example, helping pupils to think about how characters in a story might be feeling.
33. The school's personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) curriculum is based on a commercially produced package that is adapted to meet the school's needs. The curriculum includes relationships education. It covers a suitable range of topics including 'celebrating difference', 'dreams and goals' and 'healthy me'. It is taught effectively so that pupils develop a good understanding of themselves and other people.
34. In the early years, leaders address children's personal, social and emotional development well. They plan activities that are well matched to children's age and stage of development. For example, when the youngest children are developmentally ready, staff help them learn how to use the toilet as they move away from wearing nappies. Children's social skills are developed well by, for example, engaging in games where they learn to take turns. Children are not rushed but instead are enabled to develop at the speed that is right for them. As a result, children are ready for the more formal approach to learning in Year 1 by the time they get there.
35. Physical education (PE) is taught effectively by skilled and knowledgeable staff. Pupils develop a suitable range of skills, such as learning to throw and catch balls with accuracy. They join in enthusiastically and are supportive of their classmates, cheering each other on during races. In the early years, children are provided with plentiful opportunities for physical development. In the outside areas, children are encouraged, for example, to run, climb, balance and use tricycles. Staff also carefully plan activities to develop children's finger strength and dexterity. These help children to be ready to learn to hold a pencil properly as they start to write.
36. Pupils behave well throughout the school. They are polite and well mannered, routinely saying 'please' and 'thank you' as they ask for and receive their lunch. Staff establish expectations about behaviour as soon as children join the early years, using appropriate approaches for their age. The behaviour policy is followed consistently and applied fairly.
37. Pupils learn about bullying through the PSHE curriculum. They learn what bullying is and how it is different to falling out with a friend. Pupils know that staff are there to help them if they are worried or concerned. Incidents of bullying are very rare. Suitable systems are in place to deal with them when they do occur.

38. The school's two sites are clean, secure and well maintained. Robust systems are in place to ensure that all health and safety requirements, including those relating to fire safety, are met fully and consistently. The proprietor monitors these systems very closely to assure themselves that regulations are met consistently.
39. The school is well staffed. In the early years, there are more adults than are required by legislation for the number of children in each class. Throughout the school, pupils are well supervised, both during lesson times and less structured times of the day.
40. Pupils attend school regularly and on time. Leaders monitor attendance closely and take appropriate action in response to pupils' absence, when necessary. Leaders report to, and take advice from, the local authority about attendance, as appropriate. The school's admission register is well maintained and includes all the required information. Leaders report to the local authority when pupils leave or join the school at non-standard times during the academic year.
41. Leaders put robust measures in place for first aid and the administration of medicines. All staff complete full paediatric first aid training so that they are able to deal with any incidents that occur. Processes for managing allergies and other medical conditions are rigorous.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to pupils' physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing

- 42. All the relevant Standards are met.**

Section 4: Pupils' social and economic education and contribution to society

43. The curriculum is used well to help pupils to start to develop an understanding of fundamental British values such as mutual respect and democracy. For example, pupils are given opportunities to vote to elect members of the school council or for the books they like best. Teachers look for opportunities to develop pupils' understanding that people view things differently and have varying beliefs. They introduce pupils to people from a wide range of backgrounds who have contributed to the world and to British society. For example, teachers share books with pupils written by authors with a diverse range of cultural backgrounds.
44. Pupils learn about health and other public services. Visits, such as from the mounted police, help pupils to understand how people help us. Pupils also learn about institutions, including the royal family, and take part in activities such as a recent tea party to celebrate the King's official birthday. This helps pupils to develop an age-appropriate understanding of the country that they live in.
45. Pupils learn about the importance of helping other people from an early age. In the early years, children are encouraged to help each other, for example, by serving food to their classmates during snack time. Pupils take part in charity events and begin to understand the importance of raising money to support people who are in need.
46. Pupils are taught about the importance of rules. When they join their new class in September, they work with their teacher to formulate the expectations for their class. These are displayed and referred to throughout the year. Pupils are supported to understand how rules help to keep everyone safe and to make school an enjoyable place for everybody.
47. The school uses a restorative approach on occasions when pupils do not follow the rules. That is, they help pupils to understand what was wrong about their behaviour and how to put it right. Pupils learn that there are rules about how adults should behave and that the police are there to help us when people break them.
48. Children's economic education begins in the early years. For example, they are given coins to 'spend' in role play areas to help them develop an early understanding of what it means to buy something. Pupils' knowledge and understanding is developed further through the mathematics curriculum. They learn about currency and begin to understand how money works.
49. Pupils are given opportunities to take responsibility in different ways as they move through the school. For example, they take on roles such as class maintenance monitor and eco-council representative. Children in the early years are encouraged to put things away in the right places and to tidy up after themselves. This helps them to gradually become more self-confident and independent.
50. Staff focus well on children's social development in the early years. They think carefully about what to focus on, when and how. Staff plan activities, sometimes for children to do independently and sometimes supported by adults, which help them learn to persevere, get on well with each other and ask for help when they are stuck. This helps children to develop friendships, feel secure at school and to make good progress.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to pupils' social and economic education and contribution to society

51. All the relevant Standards are met.

Safeguarding

52. The school has a strong safeguarding culture. Leaders put the promotion of pupils' wellbeing and safety at the heart of all the decisions they make. This is understood and put into practice effectively by staff throughout the school.
53. Staff receive safeguarding training when they join the school, as part of their induction. They receive regular ongoing training and safeguarding updates. As a result, staff have a secure understanding of the school's procedures and practices. They are vigilant and know the possible signs of abuse or neglect to look out for. They report any concerns promptly using the school's agreed systems.
54. Staff know how to report low-level concerns about adults that work in the school, including self-referrals. They do so in a timely fashion when matters arise. These concerns are dealt with thoroughly and appropriately by leaders.
55. The school's designated safeguarding team are knowledgeable, experienced and well trained. There are sufficient trained members of the team to ensure that there is always someone available for staff to go to with concerns on both school sites. The safeguarding team responds appropriately to concerns, taking timely action, as appropriate. Risk assessments are put in place for individual pupils when the need arises. Leaders work effectively with local safeguarding partners, such as children's social care and the police, where necessary, to protect pupils.
56. Suitable processes are in place for the safer recruitment of staff. All necessary checks are carried out before anyone is allowed to start work at the school. These checks are recorded in the school's single central record, which is monitored regularly by the proprietor.
57. Pupils are taught about safety in an appropriate way for their age and stage of development. Pupils learn about, for example, medicines, road safety, safe touch and safe secrets. Pupils are taught about online safety. For example, children in the early years learn what to do when 'pop-ups' appear on their tablets. Older pupils learn that we cannot always believe everything we see on the internet. The school has suitable filtering and monitoring systems in place to limit and check the online content pupils have access to. This is reviewed regularly and thoroughly by the proprietor.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

- 58. All the relevant Standards are met.**

School details

School	North Bridge House Nursery and Pre-Prep School
Department for Education number	202/6174
Address	North Bridge House Nursery and Pre-Prep School 8 Netherhall Gardens Hampstead London NW3 5RR
Phone number	020 7267 6266
Email address	sarah-cartwright-styles@cognita.com
Website	www.northbridgehouse.com/nursery-pre-prep-hampstead
Proprietor	Cognita Schools Limited
Chair	Mr James Carroll
Headteacher	Mrs Sarah Cartwright-Styles
Age range	2 to 7
Number of pupils	201
Date of previous inspection	15 to 17 June 2022

Information about the school

59. North Bridge House Nursery and Pre-Prep School is a co-educational day school in Hampstead, London. The school operates on two sites that are a short walk from each other. The nursery site is in Fitzjohn's Avenue and the pre-prep in Netherhall Gardens. The school is part of the North Bridge House group of schools. It is owned by a limited company, overseen by a board of governors. Two new deputy headteachers, one for each of the school's sites, took up their posts in September 2022. The headteacher joined the school in September 2024.
60. There are 136 children in the early years comprising nine Nursery and two Reception classes.
61. The school has identified 29 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Five pupils in the school have an education, health and care (EHC) plan.
62. The school has identified 120 pupils as speaking English as an additional language.
63. The school states its aims are: to create a dynamic learning environment in which all children discover their individual pathway to academic success; to empower young people to be creative, inspired and to inspire; to equip young people with the confidence, humility and resilience to thrive in everything they do; and to nurture strong relationships within an inclusive, empathetic community.

Inspection details

Inspection dates

24 to 26 June 2025

64. A team of three inspectors visited the school for two and a half days.

65. Inspection activities included:

- observation of lessons, some in conjunction with school leaders
- observation of a sample of extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection
- discussions with the chair of governors
- discussions with the headteacher, school leaders and other members of staff
- discussions with pupils
- scrutiny of samples of pupils' work
- scrutiny of a range of policies, documentation and records provided by the school.

66. The inspection team considered the views of members of staff and parents who responded to ISI's pre-inspection surveys.

How are association independent schools in England inspected?

- The Department for Education is the regulator for independent schools in England.
- ISI is approved by the Secretary of State for Education to inspect independent schools in England, which are members of associations in membership of the Independent Schools Council.
- ISI inspections report to the Department for Education on the extent to which the statutory Independent School Standards, the EYFS statutory framework requirements, the National Minimum Standards for boarding schools and any other relevant standards are met.
- For more information, please visit **www.isi.net**.

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