



## **SCHOOL INSPECTION SERVICE**

### **INSPECTION REPORT FOR ST NICHOLAS PREPARATORY SCHOOL**

**DfE No: 213/6390**

#### **The key inspection judgements for this school are:**

<b>The quality of education</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Pupils' personal development</b>	<b>Outstanding</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Safeguarding pupils' welfare health and safety</b>	<b>Outstanding</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Leadership, management and governance</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Effectiveness of the Early Years' provision</b>	<b>Outstanding</b>	<b>1</b>

#### **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.

#### **Compliance with the requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage:**

The school meets the requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage.

**Date of inspection: 21-23 March 2017**

## **SECTION A: SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS**

The quality of education provided by St. Nicholas Preparatory School is good. Pupils learn well and make good progress from their different starting points. They get off to a flying start in the early years and achieve above the national expectations for this age group. The quality of the early years' provision, including its leadership and management, is outstanding. Throughout the school, the quality of teaching and assessment is good. There are some excellent examples of teaching. The provision for pupils who speak English as an additional language is especially effective. Pupils make good progress in reading and mathematics due to teachers' use of assessment information which ensures all pupils are suitably challenged. Progress in writing is not as strong as in reading or mathematics. This is because some teachers are not yet identifying precisely what the pupils need to do to improve their use of written language. There are not enough opportunities for pupils to apply and consolidate their writing skills in all subjects. The quality of the curriculum is good and pupils enjoy the wide range of clubs and trips on offer. There are suitable plans for all subjects although some, for example in art and history, do not identify clearly enough pupils' progression in knowledge and skills throughout the school. The quality of pupils' personal development is outstanding. The school promotes British values well and its use of positive discipline ensures high standards of behaviour. Procedures for safeguarding pupils' welfare, health and safety are outstanding. Leadership, management and governance are good. The interim headteacher and senior leaders are successful in securing improvements in the school's work. The arrangements for governance support their work very effectively. Leaders for English and mathematics are bringing about improvements rapidly in these subjects. Cognita has arranged training for other subject leaders to ensure pupils make consistently strong gains in all subjects.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT:**

Whilst not required by the regulations, the proprietor should:

- improve pupils' progress in writing by:
  - identifying precisely the next steps in learning for individuals and groups and making sure that the pupils apply them in their writing;
  - providing pupils with regular opportunities to use and consolidate their newly acquired skills in a range of writing across subjects; and
- identify more clearly progression in knowledge and skills in lesson planning for subjects other than English and mathematics to secure consistently strong progress for pupils in all areas throughout the school.

## **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). The school was given two days' notice of inspection.

In reaching their judgements, the inspectors observed a range of lessons and examined samples of the pupils' work, together with information on their progress. The school's website, curriculum documentation, policies and records were scrutinised. Interviews were held with a number of staff and a representative of the proprietorial body, and the inspectors spoke to groups of pupils. They also took account of 100 questionnaires completed by parents before the inspection.

The inspectors were:

Reporting Inspector:	Mrs Sue Frater
Team inspectors:	Dr Martin Bradley

### **INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL:**

St Nicholas Preparatory School is a non-selective co-educational independent school for boys and girls between the ages of three and eleven years of age. It is located in the Westminster area of London. The school is governed by Cognita Schools Limited.

A total of 221 pupils attend the school. The 56 children in the early years foundation stage (EYFS), including those who are already five years of age, are taught in nursery and reception classes. No pupil currently has an education and health care plan. The school has identified approximately 20 percent of the pupils as needing some additional support, often for language purposes. However, over 80 percent of pupils speak English as an additional language (EAL). About 40 percent of pupils join or leave the school at times other than the start of reception class.

The school follows the national curriculum. Pupils from Year 1 who are bilingual in French and English have the opportunity to follow the French national curriculum (CNED) in a course moderated by the French government's ministere de l'education nationale. Depending on their choice of secondary school, some pupils are entered for the Independent Schools Examination Board 11+ entrance examination.

The substantive headteacher left the school in October 2016 and the deputy head took on the role of interim headteacher. A new headteacher has been appointed for September 2017. The school was last inspected in October 2013.

## SECTION C: THE INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

### 1. THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The quality of education provided by the school is good.

#### **Pupils' learning and achievement**

Pupils learn well and enjoy school. Pupils who join the school from other schools, including from overseas, quickly settle and make good progress. Those at an early stage of speaking English rapidly gain a good command of the language. This enables them to access the full curriculum. The school identifies pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and provides appropriate support to help them to make good progress. It also provides opportunities for gifted and talented pupils to excel, for example in the performing arts or sport.

Younger pupils make good progress in reading, with some making exceptional progress, due to the effective teaching of phonics (letters and sounds). Their attainment is above the national average by the end of Year 2. Attainment is also above average for the most able pupils by the end of Year 6. The school has identified the need to extend the comprehension skills of some of the older pupils. Pupils read regularly in school and for homework and can talk about favourite books and authors. Visiting authors inspire them to read a wider range of books and to take books home regularly from the school library.

Pupils make good progress in mathematics by the end of Year 2 and their attainment in the national curriculum is above national figures. Attainment by the end of Year 6 was broadly in line with national expectations in 2016. However, due to improvements in teaching, the older pupils are now making good progress in this subject. Practical activities and visual resources such as weighing and measuring, and film clips, are helping the pupils to develop mathematical concepts.

Pupils' progress and attainment in writing are not as strong as in mathematics and reading. Senior leaders have identified barriers to progress, particularly for EAL pupils, as a limited knowledge of English vocabulary, sentence structure and tenses. EAL specialist teachers are highly successful in supporting pupils at an early stage of speaking English to make progress in these areas, especially through enabling the pupils to talk about their ideas. Some teachers are not yet identifying precisely enough what individual pupils need to do to secure rapid progress in their writing.

The interim leadership team has rightly focused on improving pupils' learning in English and mathematics. Progress in other subjects is not yet consistently strong. However, due to the emphasis on reading, writing and mathematics, pupils are well prepared for the secondary phase. All go on to schools of their choice.

#### **The quality of teaching and assessment**

The quality of teaching and assessment is good. Improvements in the teaching of reading, including phonics, are enabling pupils to tackle unfamiliar texts

confidently. Guided reading sessions are planned well, with activities and books that are matched carefully to the pupils' different stages of learning. Teachers and teaching assistants ask probing questions which are extending pupils' comprehension.

The quality of teaching is now good in mathematics lessons where teachers match the level of challenge to the pupils' differing starting points and use a range of resources to help them to learn. For example, in a Year 2 mathematics lesson, the teacher challenged the pupils to judge whether differently shaped containers held the same amount of liquid. A video clip and the use of measuring jugs ensured the pupils, including those with SEND and the most able, rapidly gained the concept of capacity. Problem solving activities were matched to pupils' prior learning in measuring and the teacher checked constantly that each pupil was making at least good progress.

The interim headteacher and other leaders have rightly reviewed the teaching of writing to include more emphasis on developing pupils' use of grammar, punctuation and spelling. However, pupils are finding it difficult to recall these skills because they are not yet given enough opportunities to apply them in extended pieces of writing, for example across other subjects. Teachers are now setting targets for pupils, but some are not precisely matched to what each pupil needs to do next to improve their work.

The interim headteacher has developed a clear assessment policy which has resulted in the systematic marking of pupils' work and effective systems for monitoring and recording their progress. However, the quality of marking and feedback is uneven, enabling pupils to make rapid gains in some subjects, such as reading and mathematics, but not in others.

### **The quality of the curriculum**

The quality of the curriculum is good. It is broad, but with a clear focus on developing language and mathematical skills. This balance is well suited to the needs of the pupils, many of whom join the school from overseas and who have significantly varying prior educational experiences. Planning for English and mathematics follows the national curriculum. It is detailed and tailored to pupils' differing needs. There are useful, if brief, subject overviews for science, French, humanities, art and design technology, music, physical education and games, religious education and personal, social, health and economic education. An outline is provided for subjects in each year group from Year 1 to Year 6 which informs teachers' weekly planning. However, planning for progression in knowledge and skills across the school in some of these subjects, such as science, art and history, is not yet detailed enough to ensure pupils make consistently outstanding progress in all subjects. The curriculum is enhanced by a wide range of clubs such as jazz dance, judo, musical ensembles, Lego and football, together with school trips and visiting speakers.

The school follows the Montessori curriculum in the nursery and reception classes. The transition from this activity-based approach to a more teacher-led curriculum is developed appropriately in Year 1 classes.

The CNED programme is taught by specialist French teachers. The programme challenges the pupils effectively to develop skills which equip them to go on to French speaking schools if they wish.

Support for pupils with SEND and EAL is particularly good. The impact of the intervention activities on pupils' progress is recorded and evaluated rigorously. The provision enables pupils to make at least good progress by equipping them with key skills.

## **2. THE QUALITY OF PUPILS' PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT**

The quality of pupils' personal development is outstanding. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent and this fulfils the school's aims very well. The pupils learn about faiths and cultures through the international nature of the school. They enjoy cultural activities such as visits to local museums, performing in school productions and partaking in school trips, including an annual ski trip.

The active promotion of the British values of democracy, the rule of law, tolerance and individual liberty is well embedded in the schemes of work for pupils' personal, social, health and economic education and in the ethos of the school. For example, pupils visit the Houses of Parliament, hold their own elections for the school council, establish classroom rules and host visits from public services such as the police. Pupils develop a strong sense of right and wrong. This moral compass equips them well in considering how they should treat others with respect.

The impact of the school's arrangements is that, in line with the school's values, pupils are ambitious for success, resilient, respectful and they work and play together well. The positive relationships between pupils and with their teachers help to develop pupils' confidence and self-esteem. Pupils' behaviour in classrooms and around the school is excellent. Teachers have very good strategies to encourage the few pupils who find it difficult to manage their own behaviour to act responsibly. Most pupils attend school regularly, although some visit their families abroad on occasions during the term.

## **3. SAFEGUARDING PUPILS' WELFARE, HEALTH AND SAFETY**

The provision for safeguarding pupils' welfare, health and safety is outstanding. The school has been supported extremely well by Cognita in developing a wide range of relevant policies which place safeguarding at the heart of the school. Staff have been trained effectively to identify safeguarding issues, including the prevention of radicalisation and extremism. There are close links with local authority staff and other external partners with whom emergency contact can be made.

Senior leaders have developed effective procedures for tackling bullying. As a result, pupils know how to keep themselves safe, including from cyber-bullying, and staff deal promptly and effectively with the very few issues that arise. Pupils say they feel safe in school. They can also explain how to keep themselves healthy, for example through healthy eating and participation in sport. They are

encouraged to think positively about themselves, their learning and different situations.

Procedures for the recruitment and vetting of staff are comprehensive and thorough. Appropriate checks are made and recorded rigorously.

The arrangements for securing pupils' welfare, health and safety in school are highly effective. Records show that regular fire drills are carried out and fire precautions are suitably maintained. Checks are also made on lock down and ingress procedures. Medical arrangements are reviewed regularly and suitable facilities and procedures are in place to support pupils' medical needs. A good number of staff are trained in first aid, including paediatric first aid. Risk assessments for on and off site activities clearly identify any issues and minimise risks to pupils. The pupils are extremely well supervised. The admission and attendance registers are maintained well.

#### **4. LEADERSHIP, MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE**

The quality and effectiveness of leadership and management are good. The leadership and management of the EYFS are outstanding.

The interim headteacher and other senior leaders have established a culture in which all pupils are valued and their personal development and welfare are given high priority. The school's work is monitored well and areas for improvement identified accurately. School improvement planning provides clear direction for the staff and their morale is high.

The interim senior leadership team has quickly gained an accurate view of the school's strengths and areas for development, including through analysis of progress information, examination of pupils' books and by observing lessons. They are wisely focusing on improving performance in English and mathematics and are taking appropriate action. Improvements in the quality of teaching and learning in these subjects are leading to an increase in pupils' progress. The developments are supported by effective procedures for managing staff performance and identifying suitable training and support. Regular progress meetings are held with individual teachers to discuss how pupils' achievement can be improved. The meetings are facilitated by the improved system for tracking pupils' progress.

Cognita has rightly identified appropriate training for subject leaders. However, because the training is at an early stage, the uneven quality of curriculum planning has not yet been addressed.

All the independent school standards are met, including those for the premises and accommodation, information to parents and the handling of complaints. Some deterioration in the stucco work on the outside of the school was reported to the interim headteacher who has taken swift action to arrange its repair.

#### **Governance**

The quality and effectiveness of governance are good.

Cognita has a thorough understanding of the school's provision and the independent school standards. It ensures that all standards are met and that the school has the resources it needs.

Cognita has provided highly effective support for the interim headteacher. This consists of support from an executive headteacher for developing the arrangements for safeguarding pupils, and support and challenge from an assistant director of education. The impact is seen in the robust systems that are now in place, such as for checking the suitability of staff to work with children.

## **5. THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE EARLY YEARS' PROVISION**

The overall effectiveness of the early years' provision is outstanding. The school follows the Montessori approach throughout the nursery and reception years. Leadership and management have ensured that the nursery and reception classes have consistent approaches to planning and teaching, and to the assessment and recording of children's progress. Safeguarding is highly effective and supported well by documents provided by Cognita. Children's personal development, behaviour and welfare are excellent. They are supported strongly by the school's use of a positive discipline programme. The outcomes for children are outstanding.

Leadership and management are outstanding. Leadership in the early years successfully promotes children's learning. Key skills are consistently well developed and there is a strong focus on personal development to underpin learning. Children's progress is monitored closely to ensure that any difficulties are quickly identified and dealt with. Montessori materials are used effectively throughout the early years. The transition to using and recording writing and number on paper begins appropriately in the reception classes. The early years team has formed a good partnership with parents. The promotion of equality, diversity and British values is at the heart of the early years' work. Safeguarding and welfare meet all statutory requirements. Both indoors and out, there is a culture of vigilance which ensures that the children feel safe. Leadership works in close liaison with partner agencies in the event of any concerns being raised.

Teaching, learning and assessment are outstanding. The staff are excellent Montessori practitioners. The outstanding quality of their work lays solid foundations for children's later learning. The staff successfully encourage children to be independent learners, and to develop persistence and concentration in their learning. The staff have consistently high expectations of what each child can achieve. Their planning identifies individual children's learning needs as well as meeting the requirements of the EYFS. The assessment and monitoring of children's learning are excellent and staff are extremely well deployed to gain the relevant information. Adult-centred sessions, such as developing sign language and phonic sessions, sustain the children's enthusiasm with excellent pace and varied activities. The outdoor work cycle is very well organised allowing the children space and time to explore activities and their environment. As a result of this excellent range of learning opportunities, the children make particularly good

progress. A minority of sessions led by specialist subject teachers are less well matched to the children's levels of development. Timetabling for such lessons is linked to the older pupils' timetables. This interrupts the extended Montessori work cycles, resulting in very short sessions after the specialist lesson. The school is addressing this issue. Good information is provided to parents on their children's learning and the ways in which they can support this at home. There are regular meetings with parents. Parents are also involved in promoting diversity, coming in to read stories and to celebrate international days, and similar events.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare are excellent. There is a positive culture of learning throughout the early years. The children enjoy coming to school and are happy and secure. They develop self-confidence and independence and are able to use their imaginations such as when making 'fairy soup'. Attendance is prompt and regular. Behaviour and conduct form the basis of much of the early years' work and there are clear and well understood strategies for promoting this effectively. The children understand how to keep themselves safe and healthy. They are prepared well to respect others and to contribute to discussions, such as when naming a soft toy. Visits by organisations including the police have contributed to their understanding of life in Britain.

The outcomes for children are outstanding. The children progress well from their different starting points. For most, English is an additional language in which they rapidly learn to reach a good standard for their age. Most meet or exceed the level of development typical for their age and all are able to move on to the next stage of their education.

## SCHOOL DETAILS

Name of school:	St Nicholas Preparatory School			
Address of school:	23 Princes Gate, London, SW7 1PT			
Telephone number:	020 7225 1277			
Email address:	<a href="mailto:info@stnicholasprep.co.uk">info@stnicholasprep.co.uk</a>			
Web address	<a href="http://www.stnicholasprep.co.uk">www.stnicholasprep.co.uk</a>			
Proprietor:	Cognita			
Person registered with DfE as proprietor under paragraph 20 of Part 4:	Chris Jansen			
Head Teacher:	Anna Guerin (Interim)			
Early Years Manager	Lauren Taylor			
DfE Number	213/6390			
Type of school	Independent school			
Annual fees	£12,405-16,845pa			
Age range of pupils	3-11			
Gender of pupils	Mixed			
Total number on roll	full-time	221	part-time	16
Number of children under-5	Boys:	18	Girls:	24
Number of compulsory school age pupils	Boys:	95	Girls:	84
Number of post-compulsory pupils	Boys:	0	Girls:	0
Number of pupils with EHCP or statements of SEND	Boys:	0	Girls:	0
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	Boys:	87	Girls:	95
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](http://www.schoolinspectionsservice.co.uk).**