

North Bridge House Senior School

Independent School

Inspection report

DCSF Registration Number	202/6269
Unique Reference Number	100074
Inspection number	318153
Inspection dates	5-6 December 2007
Reporting inspector	Martyn Groucutt

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 Children, Schools and Families about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

Information about the school

North Bridge House Senior School is now part of the Cognita group of schools. It provides an education for boys and girls between the ages of 11 and 16 and is situated in north west London. The school has 132 boys and 48 girls on roll, a total of 180 pupils. Of these, 36 speak languages other than English as their principal language, though none are at early stages of English language acquisition. Within the school, 24 pupils have learning difficulties or disabilities, two of whom are in possession of a statement of special educational need. The school was last inspected in 2003.

The majority of pupils enter the school after completing their primary education in local authority schools. Last year all pupils went on to other schools in the public or private sectors to complete A-level studies after leaving North Bridge House.

Evaluation of the school

Standards have been rising in recent years since the last inspection. The school now provides a good quality of education because of the strong leadership of the headteacher. Pupils are admitted performing at or above the national average and continue to make progress, achieving very good success at GCSE. Teaching is generally of good quality, some is outstanding. Pupils' behaviour is outstanding. Parents and pupils hold the school in high regard. Creative aspects of the curriculum promote a breadth to the learning experience, an exhibition of recent photography produced by the pupils being particularly noteworthy. Virtually all the regulations are met.

Quality of education

The curriculum is good. The school has an effective curriculum set out in writing and supported by schemes of work and curriculum maps. Pupils gain from the whole range of learning experiences, with practical experience of the aesthetic and cultural being valued as highly as learning in the linguistic, mathematical and scientific areas. Pupils show good numeracy and literacy skills and are confident when speaking and listening. The school says that it aims to encourage pupils to be inquisitive and in this they are successful, these are pupils with enquiring minds. They also display mature behaviour and a mutual concern of the highest order that is noticeable throughout

the school. Pupils participate well and as a result are able to make good progress. Two thirds of the pupils join in the good range of extra-curricular activities.

The special needs coordinator identifies pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities and plans good additional programmes for them. The co-ordinator does not have enough time to monitor the progress of these pupils appropriately when they are in ordinary classes. Similarly, the school acknowledges the need to appoint a coordinator for gifted and talented pupils in order to fully maximise their potential. Careers education does not meet requirements as it is poorly developed and there is no opportunity for older pupils to undertake work experience. However, the school does encourage pupils to start to think about the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of adult life. This is reinforced through highly effective personal, social and health education.

The quality of teaching and assessment is good and is sometimes outstanding. Planning is detailed and effective, using the school's common system. This makes clear the expectation that available time will be used carefully, so that a range of learning opportunities and experiences will be offered during the lesson. Practical and creative elements are strong. For example, a chemistry practical was set up with care and students were encouraged to think carefully about their results. Teachers and pupils demonstrate very good relationships and teachers know their pupils at an individual level. Teachers show good subject knowledge and a new performance management system encourages the further development of professional expertise. The development of individual portfolios of pupils' work shows hard evidence of progress in some departments and the school is looking to extend their use to all subjects. The use of computers in classrooms as an aid to teaching and learning has similarly been identified as an area for development. The school is looking to further develop its computer facilities and training opportunities for staff.

Short-term assessment is thorough and pupils receive an effort and attainment grade every four weeks. Work is marked thoroughly. The school's ability to track individual pupils' progress across all subjects over time lacks sophistication. Similarly, the process of predicting GCSE grades is poorly developed. Last year the school correctly estimated the final grade correctly in only half of the exam entries. The school is aware of the need to improve these areas and is obtaining computer software that will help it to move forward.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

Provision for pupils' personal development is good. Throughout the school it is clear that pupils have benefited from opportunities to develop their self-knowledge, self-esteem and self-confidence. The pupils are mature and well informed. They are encouraged to develop a respect for the law and to distinguish right from wrong. Knowledge of public institutions is promoted well, for example, through the annual Year 7 visit to Parliament. The pupils themselves established an Amnesty International club last year, through which they wrote to individuals imprisoned

without trial and invited a speaker to talk to them about the Arab-Israeli conflict. Within the school, many cultures, ethnic backgrounds and religious beliefs are found; each is treated with respect. For example, one Muslim boy said that through his friendship with a fellow pupil who is Jewish he has learned a lot about Judaism. However, the pupils are not so well informed about asylum seekers and refugees in the locality. At a local level, the school is now trying to develop community links, such as the recent contact made with a home for older residents.

Drama and the visual arts are strong elements of the wider curriculum and are used to foster positive views of the wider world. Such opportunities flourish within the formal curriculum. A world map displayed outside the geography room shows countries that still use capital punishment.

There is no doubt that pupils enjoy their education, their positive views were strongly reflected in the pupil questionnaires. They are also encouraged to think about their future and economic well being. This is supported through, for example, excellent provision for modern foreign languages and mathematics.

There are good examples of pupils making a positive contribution, not least the support given to the organisation 'Activenture', which provides summer camps for young people with physical disabilities. Year 7 pupils visit the camp and in the upper years, they train as leaders and work as volunteers.

Welfare, health and safety of the pupils

The school makes good provision for the welfare, health and safety of pupils. It is a safe place in which to work and learn. The school shows diligence in regard to pupils' safety arriving and leaving the school site. This is especially important because of its location close to a busy road junction. Pupils are well aware of the importance of staying safe and healthy. School lunches provide carefully planned healthy options for pupils to select with fruit and salad. Health and safety matters are a high priority and risk assessments are carried out effectively in school and for visits. A large number of staff are trained in first aid, accidents are recorded diligently and appropriate arrangements made for pupils who are unwell. An extensive range of clear and helpful policies is in place and reflected in the schools' good procedures. Attendance is well monitored, regular or unusual patterns of absence are fully investigated and any absences followed up promptly by the school office. Arrangements for the safeguarding of pupils are good and include external training for all members of staff. Pupils are very well supervised at all times. The school has a suitable policy with regard to the Disability Discrimination Act 2002.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

Procedures for checking the suitability of staff to work with children meet all requirements. The school has a good staff appointment system, which ensures that appropriate checks are undertaken before staff are appointed.

School's premises and accommodation

The building is clean, tidy and well maintained throughout, with adequate lighting, heating and ventilation. Furniture and fittings are satisfactory and are being improved on a rolling programme. Corridors and classrooms show a wide range of pupils' work and other visual materials that create a positive learning environment. Some rooms are small, but since groups are also small this does not create an overcrowding issue. While there is no outdoor space at the school, pupils use Regents Park for recreation. This is organised safely and a first aid box is always taken by a member of staff.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

The school provides a good range of information for parents, carers and others. The informative prospectus is supplemented by a range of helpful additional information. The parents' handbook, recently updated, is especially helpful in the range and quality of information that it provides. Regular letters are also helpful and keep parents informed on events in school. Annual reports are sent to parents at the end of the autumn and summer terms. Two parents' consultation meetings are held for all year groups each year so that parents can talk directly to staff about the progress their children are making. Parents were extremely positive in their response to the pre-inspection questionnaire. All felt their children were safe and well cared for and that they were kept well informed. One parent wrote that the school provided '*a wholesome and warm environment which fosters individual growth*'.

Procedures for handling complaints

The school's arrangements for handling complaints meet requirements. In addition to publishing detailed arrangements for parental complaints, the school has a procedure by which pupils can also make complaints that will be duly investigated.

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 the curriculum (standard 1) and must:

- provide appropriate careers guidance (paragraph 1(2)(g)).

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:

- increase the amount of time available for the special education coordinator to monitor and support the implementation of pupils' individual education plans
- continue to develop the use of information and communication technology as a tool for teaching and learning
- develop the tracking of individual pupils' progress and 'value added' as they progress through the school, and the accuracy of predicting likely GCSE grades
- improve pupils' understanding of their local community through contributing to community life and through developing an understanding of those who have recently entered the locality in challenging circumstances, such as asylum seekers or refugees.

School details

Name of school	North Bridge House Senior School		
DCSF number	202/6269		
Unique reference number	100074		
Type of school	Secondary		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	1987		
Age range of pupils	11-16 years		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll	Boys: 132	Girls: 48	Total: 180
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need	Boys: 2	Girls: 0	Total: 2
Number of pupils who are looked after	Boys: 0	Girls: 0	Total: 0
Annual fees	£ 11,250		
Address of school	1 Gloucester Avenue London NW1 7AB		
Telephone number	0207 267 6266		
Fax number	0207 267 0071		
Email address	Alexandra.Ayre@northbridgehouse.com		
Headteacher	Miss A Ayre		
Proprietor	Cognita Group		
Reporting inspector	Martyn Groucutt		
Dates of inspection	5-6 December 2007		