



SCHOOL INSPECTION SERVICE

INSPECTION REPORT FOR POLAM SCHOOL

DfE No: 822/6000

The key inspection judgements for this school are:

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

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: 6-8 December 2016

SECTION A: SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS

Polam School is successful in meeting its aims. It provides a happy and safe learning environment where relationships are good and pupils throughout the school thrive and make good progress. Pupils of all ages say that they are happy to be at the school and their parents agree. The quality of education and pupils' learning and achievement are good. Teaching is good and has significant strengths. Small classes and high pupil teacher ratios ensure that teachers have an in-depth knowledge of the pupils, supported by an assessment system which ensures that pupils are supported and challenged at the right level. The school curriculum is good with some aspects that are of outstanding quality, although the school is still in the process of developing procedures and resources to support those who are gifted and talented. The ethos of the school and its aims contribute significantly to all aspects of its outstanding provision for pupils' personal development. The quality of provision for pupils' welfare, health and safety is outstanding. High levels of care and safeguarding ensure pupils are kept safe. The quality of leadership and management is good. With the effective support provided by the proprietor, continuity has been maintained in the school during the recent change in leadership. The overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) provision is good. Children aged 3 to 5 years old make consistently good progress in their learning; they develop well relative to their starting points and are well prepared for the next stage in their education. The school has still to ensure that all staff in the EYFS have appropriate opportunities to develop the knowledge and skills relevant to their roles.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT:

Whilst not required by the regulations, the proprietor should:

- ensure that procedures and resources are fully established to support those who are gifted and talented; and
- ensure that in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) all staff have appropriate opportunities to develop the knowledge and skills relevant to their roles.

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).

In reaching their judgements, the inspectors observed a range of lessons and extra-curricular activities. They held discussions with school leaders, staff and a representative of the proprietor, scrutinised pupils' work and examined a wide range of school documentation, including those policies required by the independent school regulations. The inspectors were:

Reporting Inspector:	Mr Mike Thirkell
Team inspectors:	Mr Martin Bradley Mrs Eileen McAndrew

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL:

Polam School is a small pre-preparatory school situated in a suburban part of Bedford. Founded in 1923, the school was purchased by the Cognita Group of schools, and merged with a similar sized pre-preparatory school, in 2008. The new headteacher took up her post in September 2016. The school occupies two large Victorian buildings which have undergone considerable refurbishment and improvement over the years. The school, which has a Christian emphasis, provides education and care for pupils aged from twelve months to nine years. Most pupils transfer into local selective independent schools and a minority to non-selective independent and state controlled middle schools in the area at the end of Year 2. The presence of a class for Years 3 and 4 enables those pupils not quite ready to move on to other schools at the age of seven to continue in 'a small, nurturing environment'. Pupils often join the school during these years to access this opportunity. There are 103 children in total attending the school currently, 60 of whom are below compulsory school age. There are no pupils with statements of learning needs, but the school has identified pupils who have learning difficulties in the Early Years. A further 4 are identified as gifted, talented or able. Seventeen children in the Nursery are identified as having English as an additional language. The aims of the school include: 'To create a broad curriculum and stimulating environment where safeguarding is a priority, where all children feel safe and secure; to provide a high quality education which inspires and nurtures a spirit of enquiry and exploration which encourages children to develop as independent lifelong learners; and to provide small classes and high pupil teachers ratios ensuring that teachers have an in-depth knowledge of the children supported by an assessment system which ensures that children are supported and challenged at the right level'. The school was last inspected in January 2014.

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' learning and achievement are good. Achievement for all pupils in English and mathematics is in line with national expectations by the end of Year 4. The majority of these pupils will have been late joiners to the school. Achievement exceeds expectations for some pupils by the end of Year 2. The majority of pupils who transferred at the end of Year 2 gain places at local selective schools. A firm foundation in literacy and numeracy is established in the EYFS enabling pupils in Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 to access the curriculum effectively. Pupils make good progress in developing their skill in literacy and numeracy. They show evidence of increasing understanding of the conventions of grammar, punctuation and spelling and are able to write with growing confidence and accuracy. Presentation of pupils' work is good. Pupils work well in groups and pairs sharing their ideas and contributing to each other's learning. There is a strong emphasis on the specialist language of subjects so in discussion pupils reinforce their own and each other's growing vocabularies. Pupils' capabilities in numeracy are good, and they are able to apply their skills effectively in problem solving. Assessment results in this aspect of numeracy were above the national average, but the school has identified it for further development as pupils scored lower, relative to other aspects of their numeracy. Pupils are highly motivated; able to concentrate; can work cooperatively; participate fully in lessons and work hard at the tasks they are given. They behave well and understand the rules of the classroom helping to ensure that no time is lost because of distraction or misbehaviour. They show consistently very positive attitudes to learning. Relationships between teachers and pupils are very good, encouraging pupils to have confidence in themselves and in their ability to achieve.

The quality of teaching and assessment

Teaching and assessment are good with significant strengths, helping to ensure that all pupils acquire new knowledge, increase their understanding and make good progress. Teachers make effective use of use of the good quality assessment information available in order to meet the differing needs of pupils. Planning includes clear learning objectives which are shared with pupils so that they will be clear about what they are expected to know, understand or be able to do by the end of the lesson. The account taken of the pupils' differing abilities is a significant strength of the teaching. Teachers employ a range of strategies and resources to make good provision for those pupils who have specific difficulties and plan extension work for the more able. Lessons are well structured and organised in both key stages.

Teachers are experienced and confident in teaching literacy and numeracy and as a result pupils make good progress in these key areas. They are well supported by effectively briefed teaching assistants. Small classes and a high ratio of adults to pupils, ensures swift and direct learning support for individuals

and groups. Teachers are adept at posing open questions which challenge pupils to think and are swift to encourage and give praise. Throughout the school teachers have high expectations which they communicate to the pupils so they are clear about what is expected of them in work and behaviour. Very good relationships between adults and pupils and pupils themselves contribute to the productive atmosphere in lessons. Pupils are highly motivated; able to concentrate for extended periods and work hard at the tasks they are set.

Assessment is good and developing well. The school has recently reviewed its marking system so that all teachers follow a common pattern which is coherent, consistent and understood by the pupils. It is in the process of being embedded in every-day practice. Marking is corrective and diagnostic, making clear why work is good and identifying at an appropriate level, next steps for improvement. Short-term targets are identified which remind pupils how to improve their work. Teachers hold half-termly progress meetings to focus on pupils who are underachieving to shape suitable provision to meet their specific need. A range of standardised tests including in English, mathematics and Reading is regularly carried out allowing teachers to compare pupils' performance with those of a similar age nationally. In addition Cognitive Ability Tests (CATs) are used to measure pupils' aptitudes across a range of capabilities and offer predictions for future examination performance. An interactive assessment programme, used in the EYFS, is currently being developed for use in Years 1 to 4. This will in time allow parents to access photographs of their child's work, read the teacher's comments and post their own response. These procedures provide a consistent, reliable framework to assess and track pupils' performance over time.

The quality of the curriculum

The curriculum is of good quality. Some aspects of the curriculum are of outstanding quality. For examples, the wide range of learning opportunities provided through extra-curricular activities and clubs. The range of topic based lessons ensures that pupils have a wide range of opportunities to broaden their learning in for example history, art, music and science. In order to promote greater depth of learning through topics, the curriculum now provides pupils in Years 1 to 4 with an opportunity to immerse themselves in an aspect of a topic that interests them for an extended period. From the foundation years pupils progressively learn French and have the opportunity to become familiar with German and Spanish. The curriculum is extended through the wide range of extra-curricular activities and clubs, which includes a range of sports, dance and singing. Opportunities for sport are excellent for a school of this size, which benefits from its own swimming pool and gymnasium. The curriculum is supported by effective planning; schemes of work are appropriately detailed and are reviewed annually. Thorough planning ensures a wide range of learning opportunities. Teachers in different year groups work together regularly and share experiences in order to modify the curriculum to meet the needs of all pupils and to ensure a smooth transition as they move through the school.

There is good provision for those pupils who have been identified as having learning difficulties. Teachers, supported by the school special needs coordinator (SENCO) ensure careful monitoring of such pupils using a 'vulnerable learner' tracking sheet. Effective monitoring and the account taken of the pupils' different

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abilities in lessons provide good support for these pupils. A group of pupils has been identified as gifted and talented and strategies for identifying and supporting them are in the process of being developed, for example by increasing differentiation through extension activities. Great care is taken to support pupils who have difficulty with transition to their next school.

2. THE QUALITY OF PUPILS' PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils is outstanding. The ethos of the school and its aims contribute significantly to all aspects of pupils' personal development. Spiritual development is effectively fostered by the curriculum in the good provision for personal social and health education, religious education (RE) and assemblies, and supported by work in the creative and expressive arts.

Pupils' moral development is outstanding. They have an increasing understanding of right and wrong through their understanding of the rules of the school and their direct involvement in writing the rules of their class. These help to reinforce pupils' understanding of good conduct in the context of everyday activities and a respect for authority. Pupils' behaviour is exemplary. They develop a growing understanding of British values through the school's emphasis on respect for others, and a sense of fairness and tolerance. Visitors to the school are carefully chosen to ensure that partisan views are not expressed. Pupils' diverse heritage is celebrated adding enrichment and extension to their learning. Pupils acquire knowledge of major world faiths through RE, strongly supported by initiatives such as the Queen's Park Faith Tour where they visit a Gurdwara, a Mosque and a Church, gaining an insight into the beliefs, values and culture of the people who worship in them.

The Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL) programme contributes to pupils understanding of themselves and how their behaviour impacts on those around them. They grow in self-esteem and self-confidence as they are well known and valued as unique individuals in the small, close community of the school. In class they have the confidence to respond and participate contributing to their own and others learning. They work effectively in pairs and groups learning to listen to one other, take turns and share their ideas to mutual benefit.

Pupils develop an increasing awareness of the notion of democracy as they vote for class members to present their suggestions for improvements to the School Council. They learn from the EYFS about those who work in public service such as fire-fighters and health workers. A visit to sing at the Christmas Tree Festival gave pupils the opportunity to meet the Lord Lieutenant and to hear from her the nature of her work and its place in public service. Pupils say they enjoy coming to school and demonstrate positive attitudes to learning. Pupils of all ages consistently work very effectively with each other, sharing knowledge and ideas and encouraging each other during paired and group work. They willingly take on responsibilities within their classes and share their growing skills and talents, for example in singing for the local community as well as in giving performances for their parents and family. Similarly, pupils reach out into the wider community through charitable giving as each year they vote to choose the charity they will work to support.

3. SAFEGUARDING PUPILS' WELFARE, HEALTH AND SAFETY

The quality of safeguarding pupils' welfare, health and safety is outstanding. The school has a comprehensive range of policies which are kept up-to-date. Practical arrangements are securely in place to safeguard and promote the pupils' welfare, health and safety and to address the dangers from fire. All matters relating to safeguarding are dealt with thoroughly by the school. Suitable risk assessments ensure that pupils are kept safe and that the appropriate action to minimise risk are identified in the risk assessment policy. Policies and procedures for first aid are suitable and an appropriate number of staff have received up to date training with respect to both first aid and safeguarding. The proprietors provide effective support with respect to safeguarding pupils' welfare, health and safety, both in terms of advice, support and the thorough preparation of policies.

The school receives helpful support from a range of specialists for all aspects of safeguarding, welfare, health and safety. As part of the governance by Cognita an Independent Chair of Safeguarding visits the school twice a year to evaluate safeguarding arrangements. A new member of staff has taken over the role of Health and Safety Officer. Though her role is currently still in the process of being embedded, procedures and policies are carefully monitored by the head teacher. The new designated safeguarding lead teacher already demonstrates a very good grasp of her role. Both responsibilities are supported by the already well established systems that support safeguarding, welfare, health and safety in the school and by the support and oversight provided regularly by the proprietor. All teachers and governors with responsibility for safeguarding are clearly identified and are appropriately trained and there is strong evidence of the effectiveness of the training and the vigilance of staff. Pupils' health is well supported by the high quality of lunches provided and good opportunities for exercise.

The school promotes good behaviour and develops positive attitudes amongst the children. Suitable behaviour and anti-bullying policies are in place and available to parents. The school has a sensitive and effective approach to dealing with matters related to bullying, preferring to refer to 'unpleasant behaviour'. Children are aware of the class rules for being kind to one another. They are clear about what to do should they experience bullying and confident that their teachers would deal effectively with any such situation. The school maintains a sanctions register but the lack of such occasions recorded reflects the schools' harmonious atmosphere and the effectiveness of supervision.

An admissions register is well maintained and daily attendance registers kept appropriately. Daily attendance is above average for the country as a whole. The school's arrangements for staff recruitment and vetting new staff are appropriate, and the relevant records and files, including the Single Central Register, are in good order.

4. LEADERSHIP, MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE

The quality of leadership and management is good. It demonstrates the skills and knowledge appropriate to its role. The new headteacher has ensured an effective transition in the school leadership and has been successful in maintaining continuity in the school. Leaders and managers demonstrate clearly their vision for the school and their support for the school aims, which are reflected in the school improvement plan. They work effectively with the proprietors to assure all matters relating to child protection. The senior leadership team has quickly become established in its roles. Key to the school's success is the support of its staff who work as an effective team. The new headteacher, who was formerly the EY Manager, has quickly and successfully become established in her new role. Appointments to the senior team have been made, although some aspects of their roles have still to become fully embedded. The appointment of a business manager has provided a further important support for leadership and management.

The headteacher leads by example and provides an effective oversight for new senior staff as they become used to roles. Self-evaluation and review is a strong feature of the school and involves all staff. This is supported by the use of ongoing monitoring of teaching by the headteacher. The leadership and management of the school, supported by the hard working and committed staff, have ensured that school is a happy place and that pupils enjoy learning and are able to make progress. Parents unanimously agree that their children like the school. Their positive response to questionnaire provided at their beginning of the inspection emphasised the strength of their support for the school and the quality of learning and support provided for their children.

Governance

The quality of governance is outstanding. The parent company has worked effectively with the school's leadership and management to ensure its continuing success and that it meets its aims. It has assured the smooth transition of the school's leadership and management and continuity in the quality of education. The headteacher is confident in the support provided by the Assistant Director of Education and emphasises the valuable roles of other specialists from Cognita. The structure established for governance is efficient with representatives of Cognita meeting regularly with the school management. They meet regularly with the school staff and provide an appropriate range of training opportunities.

The proprietors have ensured that the school is a safe place for children. Strong emphasis has been placed on providing thorough systems and procedures for safeguarding. Effective use is made of the school buildings and premises and the proprietors have provided a high quality of environment to support learning. The accommodation, including the range of specialist rooms, is well maintained and meticulously clean and contributes positively to pupils' education and learning and their achievement. Risk assessments and all matters relating to fire

prevention are dealt with appropriately. The proprietors have ensured that the school is well resourced, for example with computers. They have ensured that parents receive a good range of useful information and reports about pupils' progress are made regularly. Parents receive clear information of how they might complain should the need arise. The proprietor's have ensured that all the standards required for independent schools are met fully.

5. THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE EARLY YEARS' PROVISION

The overall effectiveness of the Early Years provision is good. Children make consistent progress in their learning and development relative to their starting points and are well prepared for the next stage in their education. The care provided by the EYFS is outstanding and the learning opportunities are good for all children including those who have special educational needs. The children's personal and emotional development is excellent and a major strength of the provision. Parents say that their children are happy. The requirements for safeguarding and welfare are fully met and the staff have a shared understanding of these. Leadership and management is good.

The effectiveness of leadership and management is good. It has undergone some changes in the past year and the school is considering ways in which staff can be supported in fulfilling their new responsibilities more effectively. A key feature of the school is its promotion of continuity not only between the different parts of the school but also in the extremely close links with Polam Nursery. Staff share an ambitious vision and appropriate expectations of the children, although some particularly able children would benefit from more specific targeted challenges. Systems for staff supervision are good and are linked to rigorous performance management and professional development. Self evaluation is good, and includes the views of parents. The computer based Interactive Learning Diaries are an effective means of communicating with parents, enabling them to contribute to their children's education. The curriculum is significantly broad and relevant: it fully meets statutory requirements. The curriculum is well planned and managed. It provides all children with a good start to their work in the school. Staff know the children extremely well. Equality and diversity are actively promoted; behaviour is managed very effectively. British values are actively supported. Child protection procedures are fully in place and meet all statutory and other government requirements. The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good. Staff have appropriate expectations of the children's learning as well as a secure understanding of the age group they work with. Assessment information is good and is shared with parents. It is used to support appropriate planning and teaching and to identify those children who need additional support. The information provided to parents enables them to understand how their children's learning and development is progressing and how they can support their child's learning. Equality of opportunity and the recognition of diversity are promoted effectively. Overall the teaching supports the children to acquire skills and the capacity to develop and learn effectively.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare are outstanding. There is a positive and shared culture across the whole of the provision. The children quickly become confident and successful independent learners who are emotionally secure. Attendance is prompt and regular. The children show great consideration for one another and respect for adults. They are beginning to understand how to keep themselves safe and healthy. Their personal development and behaviour is excellent.

The outcomes for children are good. They make good progress from their starting points and meet the level of development typical for their age. They are well prepared for the next stage in their education.

SCHOOL DETAILS

Name of school:	Polam School			
Address of school:	45 Lansdowne Road Bedford MK40 2BU			
Telephone number:	01234 261864			
Email address:	info@polamschool.co.uk			
Web address	www.polamschool.co.uk			
Proprietor:	Cognita			
Person registered with DfE as proprietor under paragraph 20 of Part 4:	Stuart Rowland			
Head Teacher:	Jessica Harris			
Early Years Manager	Cara Wharton / Jessica Harris			
DfE Number	822/6000			
Type of school	Independent school			
Annual fees	£8145 per annum			
Age range of pupils	1 year – 9 years			
Gender of pupils	Girls and boys			
Total number on roll	full-time	61	part-time	42
Number of children under-5	Boys:	30	Girls:	30
Number of compulsory school age pupils	Boys:	33	Girls:	22
Number of post-compulsory pupils	Boys:	0	Girls:	0
Number of pupils with statements of special educational need	Boys:		Girls:	
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	Boys:	6	Girls:	9
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.