SCHOOL INSPECTION SERVICE

Independent professional inspection of schools affiliated to the Focus Learning Trust, schools accredited as members of the Steiner Waldorf Schools Fellowship, and those schools belonging to the Cognita Group which are not members of the Independent Schools Council and its constituent associations

INSPECTION REPORT

INSPECTION CARRIED OUT ACCORDING TO SECTION 109(1) AND (2) OF THE EDUCATION AND SKILLS ACT 2008

Name of school:	Akeley Wood Senior School
DfE number:	825/6015
Inspection team:	Reporting Inspector: Mike Thirkell Supporting Inspectors: Jane Cooper Eileen McAndrew Sally Jenkinson
Dates of inspection:	28-30 April 2015

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SCHOOL DETAILS

Name of school: Akeley Wood Senior School

Address of school: Buckingham, MK18 5AE

Telephone number: 01280 814110

Fax number: 01280 860194

Email address: head@akeleywoodschool.co.uk

Proprietor: Cognita

Head Teacher: Mrs Jenny Clough

DfE number: 825/6015

Type of school: Independent school

Age range of pupils and students: 11 - 18

Gender of pupils:

Male and female

Total number on roll: (Full-time) Boys: 355 Girls: 201

Number of post-16 students: Boys: 63 Girls: 49

Number of pupils with statements of

special educational need: Boys: 3 Girls: 0

Annual fees: £12,855.00

Type of inspection: Section 109(1) and (2) of the Education

and Skills Act 2008

Inspection Team: Reporting Inspector: Mike Thirkell

Supporting Inspectors: Jane Cooper

Eileen McAndrew Sally Jenkinson

Dates of inspection: 28-30 April 2015

SECTION A: INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY

Purpose and scope of 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, and it follows the inspection framework laid down by SIS and the Cognita Group and agreed with the Department for Education (DfE). It was conducted by independent professional inspectors, who looked at all aspects of the school's provision as required by the current regulations.

Information about the school:

Akeley Wood Senior School has been located in attractive rural settings in North Buckinghamshire since 1946, and became part of the family of Cognita Schools in 2004. Five years later an expansion and development programme led to the school being established across two sites a short distance away from each other, the Akeley Wood site, near to the village of Akeley, and Tile House Mansion, just one mile away, near to the village of Lillingstone Dayrell. Both sites centre on large Victorian buildings, although the buildings have been considerably extended and improved to provide ample accommodation for the school, with large and attractive grounds and extensive sports fields. The school provides education for 556 boys and girls between the ages of 11 and 18. There are 112 pupils in the sixth form. Three pupils have statements of special educational needs and the school identifies a further 83 pupils who require support for varying degrees of learning difficulties. Eighty-five pupils are identified as gifted or talented. The school provides tuition, including support for English as an additional language (EAL), for a small group of 18 overseas pupils through home stay arrangements. A separate junior school situated nearby provides education for pupils from the age of 1 to 11 years.

Summary of main findings:

Akeley Wood Senior School continues to provide the high quality of education identified in its previous inspection report. It is successful in meetings its aims, including providing a supportive family atmosphere in which pupils of all abilities thrive and make excellent progress. The outstanding curriculum provides pupils with an excellent range of subjects that are relevant to each stage of their development, their learning needs and aspirations. It is augmented by a very wide range of extracurricular activities, which helps to produce open-minded and accomplished individuals. The quality of teaching and assessment is excellent and pupils acknowledge the high level of support they receive from their teachers. Teachers plan their lessons very effectively ensuring the positive use of lesson time and, as a result, pupils enjoy learning. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good and has some excellent features. Pupils show well-developed social skills. They are courteous and their behaviour is outstanding. They are well cared for and the school's arrangements for their safeguarding, welfare, health and safety are excellent.

The school aims to provide, 'an unpretentious, civilised, friendly and purposeful environment, in which pupils acquire, through small classes and enthusiastic

teaching, good qualifications, a sense of purpose, belief in themselves, and where they enjoy their school days. Good behaviour and good manners are paramount'.

What the school does well:

- it ensures the use of effective strategies and procedures for monitoring, tracking and assessing pupils' progress and, as a result, they achieve very well relative to their abilities:
- teachers' planning ensures that the individual learning needs of pupils are identified and met;
- the positive relationships between pupils and teachers promote positive learning environments throughout the school; and
- meticulous care is given to safeguarding pupils' welfare.

What the school must do to comply with the regulations:

The school meets all the regulations.

What the school must do to comply with the Equality Act 2010:

The school complies in full with the Equality Act.

Next Steps:

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

- improving the careers programme by including work experience and supplying more information for those pupils who wish to follow careers which do not involve university study; and
- improving pupils' understanding of how they can show initiative and how they might contribute more to the lives of those in the local community.

SECTION B: COMPLIANCE WITH REGULATIONS FOR REGISTRATION

PART 1 - The quality of education provided by the school

The quality of the curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is outstanding. Coupled with excellent teaching, tight assessment procedures and critical use of data, it helps pupils of all abilities to make excellent progress from their relative starting points. While placing clear emphasis on developing good basic skills for all, it also offers an excellent range of subjects and extra-curricular activities and thus caters very well for the pupils' interests, aptitudes and abilities. This provides the necessary breadth and balance for an excellent and well-rounded education which reflects fundamental British values.

There is a clear written curriculum policy which aims to ensure that all pupils have equal access to the curriculum, and that the quality of their learning experience leads to a consistently high level of involvement and achievement. It achieves this aim admirably. The strong emphasis throughout on sport and team games makes for fit and healthy young people with a strong sense of fair play and a competitive edge. An innovative feature is the Creative Curriculum, taught on Friday afternoons throughout the school. This offers an extremely wide range of experiences, some of which may be certificated, such as sports coaching and first aid. Others develop new skills or interests such as printmaking, musical theatre, robotics or archery, or are part of socially responsible projects such as re-cycling or up-cycling. Creative Curriculum is augmented by a wide variety of clubs and extra-curricular activities which encourage achievement and enjoyment in sport, art, drama and music. Many pupils undertake the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme successfully. The school has an extremely wide range of opportunities so that every pupil can find something in which they can excel. Clinics in sciences, modern foreign languages and information and communication technology (ICT) provide additional help with routine work, revision and examination technique.

In Key Stage 3, the school provides tuition in English, mathematics, science, history, geography, ICT, art, design and technology (resistant materials, food technology, and textiles), music, philosophy and religion, physical education (PE) and games. Drama is taught as a separate subject in Year 7 only. Almost all pupils study two modern foreign languages: French and Spanish or Mandarin in Year 7, and Spanish or German in Year 8 and 9. Pupils with special educational needs take one modern foreign language only and use the additional time to develop literacy skills which are individually tailored to help them overcome individual barriers to learning. All pupils follow a programme of personal, social, health and citizenship education (PSHCE) in addition to a study skills course in Years 7 and 8 called Learning for Life.

Most pupils in Key Stage 4 follow nine GCSE examination courses. All pupils study English language and literature, mathematics and science, with just over a third studying biology, physics and chemistry as separate subjects. Most also study a modern foreign language and choose three further options for GCSE from a wide range of subjects, which also include PE, media studies and theatre studies. Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) science is an option in Year 11 in place of additional science. The GCSE courses are complemented by non-examination subjects in games and PSHCE.

In the sixth form most pupils study four subjects to AS level and three subjects to A2 level. There is a free choice from 24 subjects including those offered at GCSE, with the addition of music technology, photography, politics, economics, philosophy and ethics, media studies, theatre studies and psychology.

The curriculum policy is underpinned by detailed schemes of work for each subject. These demonstrate clear plans for progression in pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding and are very well differentiated to challenge and support the full ability range. Curriculum plans reflect the fundamental British values of democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, and mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs, all of which are well represented in work across the curriculum.

Provision for pupils who have special educational needs is excellent. There are three tiers of support founded on careful assessment and close tracking of individuals' progress, together with accurate targeting of work to help them overcome barriers to learning. The right intervention programme has made a remarkable difference to the performance of most pupils who make very rapid progress in both their academic work and self-esteem. Recently introduced intervention strategies in the sixth form have boosted pupils' achievement significantly. Good provision is made for those pupils with EAL, who generally join the school in the sixth form. The school is further developing its 'Exceptional Potential' programme for pupils who have significant potential. This is also based on close assessment and careful tracking, and demonstrates the successful impact of challenging teaching and task-setting on the high achievement of the most able pupils.

The school runs its programme of PSHCE throughout Key Stages 3 and 4. It covers the topics required to ensure that pupils are prepared effectively for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of life in modern British society, including aspects of economic and financial education. Provision for careers education is embedded within this programme. Over the last year the school has developed the careers programme to include elements of psychometric testing and counselling for pupils from Key Stage 4 onwards. A number of talks have been arranged, for example, on actuarial science, journalism, energy and communication. However, work experience is not part of the careers programme, and although they are given good guidance on subject and university choices, pupils stated that there was not enough information for those seeking apprenticeships or a different pathway when they leave school.

The quality of teaching and assessment

The quality of teaching and assessment is excellent. A significantly high number of lessons observed were judged to be excellent and a number of good lessons contained excellent features. The high quality of teaching was seen throughout the school. The wide range of subjects, the specialist knowledge of teachers and the high quality of teaching skills in general ensure that all pupils, irrespective of their ability, have outstanding opportunities to acquire new knowledge and to make progress. The depth of teachers' subject knowledge and their enthusiasm for teaching have a strong influence on the high quality of teaching and learning. For example they enable teachers to extend and broaden pupils' understanding of a topic or subject through relevant interventions, as in a Year 11 revision lesson.

Teachers plan their lessons very thoroughly and without exception adhere to the expectations of the school in this respect. Planning is relevant to the requirements of each subject and reflects British values. Overall differentiation is an exceptionally good feature of teaching and learning. Throughout the school, teachers show a very good understanding of the aptitudes, needs and prior attainments of the pupils in Lesson plans ensure that pupils are provided with a clear understanding of the objectives for learning and what is to be achieved in the allotted time. Because of the high quality of lesson planning and in particular the structure provided for learning, lessons invariably proceed at a fast pace. This contributes to the excellent behaviour seen in classrooms throughout the school and the pleasure most pupils show in learning. Teachers' planning pays a high level of attention to ensuring that the particular learning needs of individual pupils are noted and addressed. This is a key factor in the school's success in meeting the needs of all pupils and ensuring that they make excellent progress. Data held centrally by the school is used effectively to up-date teachers on pupils' learning needs and particular circumstances.

Pupils' motivation to learn is supported by their positive relationships with their teachers. Pupils confirm that they feel well supported by their teachers, for example through access to additional support and the willingness of staff to give additional time to explaining difficult aspects of the work. The effective structuring of lesson time ensures that teachers have time where necessary to give individual attention to pupils in their classes, including those identified as having special learning needs or being particularly able, who are all thus enabled to make excellent progress. Discussion and communication between teachers and their pupils are frequent and are used very positively. Skilful classroom management supports the high quality of pupils' behaviour seen throughout the school. Questioning is used skilfully to ensure that when pupils have difficulty understanding they are well supported and where they are more able they are appropriately challenged. Classroom support for pupils with learning difficulties is carefully provided and learning support assistants provide discrete but valuable help. Teachers take care to ensure that all pupils in their classes receive appropriate attention, for example through careful questioning. Teachers take care to include girls well, as there are fewer girls than boys in most lessons, and also ensure that students with EAL receive appropriate support.

Teachers use resources effectively to support pupils' learning. The effective use of interactive white boards is a common feature of lessons. A range of computers are used appropriately to support pupils who have particular learning difficulties and to support particular subjects such as media studies and design and technology, with strong guidelines in place for their safe use. Display is used well throughout the school in classrooms to extend and reinforce pupils' learning.

The school has a clear framework for assessment supported by policies for assessment, marking and feedback to pupils. The school's expectations in all such respects are followed consistently by teachers. The school management, teaching staff and pupils show common understanding and expectations with respect to assessment and feedback. The quality of feedback to pupils in their exercise books is exceptional and pupils are well informed about their progress. Targets set are generally precise and their role in supporting their progress is understood by pupils. Data is used effectively to inform teachers about the learning needs of all the pupils in their classes, including those with special learning needs or particularly high ability. Computers are used effectively to track pupils' progress and to identify where they might fall below expected levels of achievement in a subject and so alert

teachers to the need for additional support to be given. The systems in place provide a particular helpful additional means for the leadership and management of the school to monitor and maintain an overview of pupils' progress.

Meticulous planning and the high quality of teaching ensure that lessons reinforce the development of mutual respect and tolerance of those of different faiths and beliefs, from an unbiased and non-partisan stance. The high quality of teaching is well supported by a regular programme of training for staff, including the sharing of particular skills and expertise that already exists in the school.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration? Yes

PART 2 - The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils is good, with some excellent features. Pupils' spiritual development is strongly fostered by religious education, which helps them to explore notions of belief and aspects of themselves beyond the material under study. The very good quality curriculum in creative and aesthetic subjects such as art, textiles, and music contributes strongly to pupils' aesthetic appreciation, as their high-quality achievement testifies. The school has recently undertaken a thorough audit of all subject departments to identify the extent and quality of the provision already made for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. This is an excellent initiative but is still work in progress, as the results are still to be analysed and improvements planned to address any weaknesses found.

Pupils develop increasing self-confidence and self-esteem because they feel valued as individuals within a settled and strongly supportive learning environment. The school ethos and the explicit aim that pupils should be happy in school contribute strongly to the quality of their personal development. In discussion with inspectors, pupils of all ages said that they enjoyed school and this is evident in their excellent behaviour, positive attitudes and improving attendance. As one older pupil put it, 'Teachers here really care about you and about their subjects - it's a good place to be'. They appreciate that their individual progress and achievements are recognised and celebrated. Pupils' moral development is excellent. They develop a clear sense of right and wrong, laying the foundations for a moral code of conduct. The 'nonnegotiables' which are posted in all teaching rooms are an explicit and familiar reminder of exactly what is expected pupils of all ages and abilities. Through work in PSHCE pupils are actively encouraged to develop a growing understanding of and respect for the law and an awareness of the rights and responsibilities of citizens, contributing to the promotion of British democratic values.

Pupils' social development has significant strengths. Throughout the school, pupils relate well to one another in class and around the school. They are able to cooperate and collaborate easily and with great effectiveness in lessons, sharing knowledge and understanding and contributing to each other's learning. The established use of peer assessment develops pupils' critical faculties well: they earn to seek the positive elements in others' work and then to identify fairly what they believe might be improved. Pupils have opportunities to take on responsibilities for example as prefects or as head girl and boy, and house captains. The primary responsibilities of prefects relate to supporting the good order of the school

organisation, supporting presentation evenings for parents and acting as ambassadors for the school. The school council, despite representatives from across the school, is not viewed by pupils as a driving force for improvement. Nevertheless, the pupils do contribute their views towards school improvement as, for example, when the school has sought the pupils' views in relation to teaching and learning across the school and their voice contributed effectively to the subsequent decision-making.

Pupils use their skills and accomplishments in the expressive and performing arts in concerts and performances for the school and for the parent community. The school recognises that it does not yet contribute sufficiently to pupils' understanding of how they might contribute to the life of its local community and this is an area for development. Pupils are thoughtful and empathetic in their understanding of the needs of those less fortunate than themselves and are swift to raise funds to contribute to a variety of charities. An exceptional aspect of this response is the Project Volunteer Sri Lanka. This worthwhile initiative gives up to twenty pupils the opportunity to work in the developing world in a country directly benefiting people whose lives are still affected by the devastating effects of natural disaster. The school raises funds throughout the year to support the community, and older pupils give their best efforts on specific projects for almost three weeks in Sri Lanka.

The curriculum in the humanities contributes to pupils' cultural development as aspects of the heritage and achievements of other countries are effectively explored. Pupils study the major word faiths gaining an increasing understanding of the similarities and differences in beliefs, religious observances and traditions. growing appreciation of the concept of equality enables older pupils to explain their understanding of equality and younger pupils to identify aspects of prejudice and discrimination and to explain the factors which might contribute to these responses. A strong emphasis has been placed on working to ensure that British values are promoted across pupils' learning experience. Work in PSHCE develops pupils' respect for, and their knowledge and understanding of the democratic principles which underpin British society and the major institutions and public services which support the every-day lives of its citizens. Pupils are made aware of current social and political affairs including most recently, the Scottish Referendum, the General election and the membership of the European Union. Visitors are regularly invited to support work in this and other areas of the curriculum. Care is taken to ensure that visitors are well briefed prior to the visit and that where political views are discussed. a balance of opposing views is presented to pupils.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration? Yes

PART 3 - The welfare, health and safety of pupils

The school makes outstanding provision for pupils' welfare, health and safety. All staff are made fully aware of their responsibility to safeguard pupils and are well trained for this role. The Deputy Head (Pastoral) is the senior designated safeguarding lead (DSL). He is supported by a team of three other senior staff, all of whom have received training in child protection at the highest level. This ensures that at all times there are competent and knowledgeable staff on hand at both school sites to deal with any issues that may arise. The school has established a strong safeguarding culture in which pupils say that they feel safe and would be comfortable

to report their concerns. An independent counsellor visits the school weekly and makes a valuable contribution to the safeguarding team. Policies and procedures for safeguarding are clear and comprehensive, reflecting the latest government guidance and the strong support of the parent company, Cognita. The DSL has forged strong and productive links with the First Response Team, the Education Safeguarding Advisory Service (ESAS), the local authority and a wide range of other agencies and services to ensure that pupils who need it have access to the most appropriate professional help. Detailed and informative child protection records are kept and held under regular review.

The school has a clear policy for promoting good behaviour which establishes rewards and sets out the sanctions to be adopted in the event of misbehaviour. Inspectors judged this policy to be implemented effectively and resulted in most pupils behaving very well. Nonetheless, pupils in Tile House expressed some concern that that they were not treated fairly and that behaviour was not handled effectively. Inspectors raised this with the Head and these matters are being taken forward by the school in a policy review. A detailed record is kept of the sanctions imposed on pupils for serious misbehaviour. This is scrutinised meticulously for patterns, so that strategies may be developed to help individuals or to pre-empt undesirable behaviour. The school has developed an excellent relationship with the Community Police Officer and has benefited from his expertise, for example, in combating cyber-bullying. There is a clear anti-bullying policy which works in tandem with the PSHCE programme to help pupils see the damage all forms of bullying behaviour can do. The school takes swift and effective action to deal with it. Staff are extremely vigilant about cyber-bullying and e-safety. The school has clear rules about the use of laptops and mobile telephones, maintains firewalls on school computers, and teaches pupils how to stay safe online and use electronic devices sensibly.

Akeley Wood Senior School goes the extra mile to ensure pupils' health and safety both on and off the school sites. Full and detailed risk assessments are completed and arrangements for overseas trips in particular are checked and discussed with great care. Maintenance and cleaning are of a very high standard. All regulatory requirements relating to fire safety are met. Drills and testing of equipment occur at regular intervals, and the lessons learnt feed into improvements. Medical arrangements are very good. There are plenty of staff on both sites who are trained in the administration of first aid; key staff in high risk areas such as science and PE hold the higher first aid at work qualifications. Pupils are taught how to look after their diet, health and fitness. They are well supervised throughout the school day and pastoral systems are very strong. Teachers care for the pupils in their charge. The admission and attendance registers are kept in good order. Vigilant monitoring of attendance data over the last year has led the school to tighten further its procedures to raise attendance, particularly in the upper part of the school. These measures are showing good effect.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration? Yes

PART 4 - Suitability of the staff, supply staff and proprietors

The school carries out all necessary employment checks on staff and Trustees, including those for the Disclosure and Barring Service. The single central record is

maintained to the highest standard and meets requirements fully. Staff files contain evidence of all required checks and documents and are kept in excellent order.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration? Yes

PART 5 - Suitability of the premises and accommodation

The school premises are situated on two rural sites in idyllic surroundings. Tile House Mansion and Akeley House were originally large country houses and both are listed buildings. Both have been extensively modernised and provide excellent accommodation which meets requirements in all respects, including the medical facilities. Akeley Wood benefits from several new buildings which provide high-quality classrooms and specialist accommodation for science, art, music, textiles, design and technology and ICT. Similarly, Tile House Mansion has dedicated rooms for specialist provision. Both sites have a gymnasium, known as 'the domes' which include suitable changing and showering facilities, extensive outdoor pitches and grassed and hard-surfaced areas for recreation and a range of sports. Both boys and girls express their enjoyment of the sports facilities available.

On both sites the accommodation provides an excellent learning environment. Classrooms on both sites are enhanced by displays of pupils' work which celebrate their achievement across the curriculum. The maintenance and cleaning of both buildings are of the highest quality, as is the upkeep of the extensive grounds.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration? Yes

PART 6 - The quality of information for parents

The quality of information provided for parents is good. A comprehensive, written report is provided each year, together with a Progress Guide three times a year, in addition to a target-setting report, an examination grade report and a Parents' Evening. The school website outlines its philosophy and ethos clearly. It contains much useful material, including relevant school policies. An attractive and informative prospectus is also available online and in printed format. The prospectus contains all the required information for parents and prospective parents. In addition it provides a range of practical information relating to term dates, the provision of transport to and from school, examination results and comments from previous inspections. Additional useful information is provided about the proprietors and university placements in the last four years.

Opportunities for parents to contact the school are very good. Good use is made of electronic communication to strengthen the school's links with parents. A very helpful e-mail system operates within the school community. This enables users to contact the school or particular members of staff easily. Parents welcome this open approach. In the words of one parent, 'if I felt strongly about something, I would know who to go to for help. The person would listen, and if he or she couldn't help with a particular issue, someone who could would be found'. 'E-newsletters are issued twice a term to parents with news and updates. A school Facebook page emphasises the open nature of the school's links with parents. Regular Parent

Engagement Meetings take place to provide a forum for discussion of school issues. Recent topics have included school transport, uniforms and communication. Parents are invited to put forward their own topics for these meetings. In their responses to questionnaires, the parents indicated their strong support for and satisfaction with the school.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration? Yes

PART 7 - The effectiveness of the school's complaints procedure

The complaints policy meets requirements in all respects. The school has established clear and appropriate strategies for dealing with any complaints. Documentation retained by the school provides clear evidence that the correct procedures are understood and are followed in practice. One formal complaint has been received in the last twelve months.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration? Yes

PART 8 - The quality and effectiveness of leadership in and management of schools

The quality of leadership and management is excellent. The proprietor has ensured that the persons with leadership and management responsibility at the school demonstrate the high levels of skills and knowledge that are appropriate to their role. The leadership and management of the school have successfully ensured that all the independent school standards are met consistently. Individual members of the senior management team demonstrate a thorough and secure knowledge of the regulations and any recent modifications to their detail. They work effectively as a team. The Head shows a clear vision for the development of the school and although she is new to the post, priorities for development have already been firmly established, and are illustrated in the document 'priorities moving forward'. The leadership and management of the school appreciate the support of Cognita, the parent company, for example in ensuring that the regulations are understood and fully met.

The effectiveness of the senior management team is well supported by a very efficient structure for regular meetings and focused training. Senior managers recognise the value of using existing good practice to support ongoing improvement in the quality of teaching and learning. Management is very well informed about the quality of teaching through an effective system of monitoring. The use of data to monitor and support pupils' progress is effective because management clearly understands its implications and use.

The leadership and management of the school ensure the well-being of all pupils. The school places a strong and successful emphasis on caring for the individual. Effective links are established with the local authority's training and advisory service as appropriate, particularly in matters relating to safeguarding. For example, the management of the school, although it is not their direct responsibility, has ensured

that all matters relating to the small number of international pupils have been addressed by the relevant agencies. Does the school meet the requirements for registration? Yes

This report has been prepared by the School Inspection Service, which provides independent professional inspection of all schools belonging to the Cognita Group which are not members of the Independent Schools Council and its constituent associations. Further copies of the report are available from the School Inspection Service website: www.schoolinspectionservice.co.uk