

Oakfields Montessori School

Independent school standard inspection report

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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, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.^{1, 2}

Information about the school

Oakfields Montessori School is an independent, co-educational day school for pupils aged from three to 11 years. The school, which is part of the Cognita group, was opened in 1993 and occupies a listed mansion house and outbuildings set in seven acres of grounds on the outskirts of Upminster. Originally established as a Montessori nursery, it now concentrates on providing a curriculum based more fully upon the Early Years Foundation Stage and National Curriculum requirements. It aims to create 'a happy, caring, structured environment where children are free to learn, to discover and to grow'. It provides a breakfast and after-school club for pupils. At the time of the inspection there were 150 pupils on roll. None of these have a statement of special educational needs although a few have specific learning needs or disabilities. Forty-four are entitled to free education for three- and four-year-olds.

At the last inspection in 2008 the school met all but three of the regulations. There have been significant staff changes since then. The headteacher, who is one of Cognita's key personnel, joined the school a year ago following the departure of the previous headteacher. The deputy headteachers, other teaching staff, the business manager and site manager have also joined the school since the last inspection.

Evaluation of the school

The school provides a satisfactory quality of education for its pupils and for the children in the Early Years Foundation Stage. The aims of the school are clearly met. Curricular provision in the main school is good and meets the needs of the pupils well; pupils are highly motivated and make satisfactory progress overall. Teaching and assessment are satisfactory. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good, as is their behaviour. The strong concern for pupils' safeguarding is reflected in good procedures for welfare, health and safety. The school has addressed the unmet regulations from the last inspection and now meets all of the regulatory requirements.

¹ www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2002/32/contents.

² www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2005/18/contents.

Quality of education

The quality of the curriculum is good. It has recently been extensively revised to provide a good range of subjects and learning opportunities. Although it has yet to have a full impact upon the progress made by all pupils, ensuring that they all make good gains in their learning, it is providing a clear structure for teaching and improvement. There are new schemes of work in place for all subject areas, detailing what is to be taught at each key stage. Although somewhat limited by space constraints, provision for art, music and drama is very strong and the teaching of French adds to the range of pupils' achievements. Sport and swimming provision further enriches the curriculum and helps promote a healthy lifestyle. A good feature of the educational provision is the opportunity provided by events such as National Poetry Day for pupils of different age groups to work together. The opportunity for older pupils to perform poems to the younger children allows them to build not only their appreciation of literature but also helps them to develop their confidence. As one pupil stated, 'I love my school, it is fun and fantastic. I feel so confident, I can do anything!'

The Kindergarten and Reception classes combine some Montessori approaches with key elements of the Early Years Foundation Stage. The outdoor provision is not yet fully established as a learning classroom. However, there are appropriate plans in place to address this shortcoming in the near future and children in these classes clearly enjoy using the resources available to them.

Teaching and assessment are satisfactory. From the time they join the Kindergarten, pupils are very keen to learn. They make satisfactory progress overall with some making good or exceptional progress. Pupils at the top of the school make the most marked progress because of well-planned, interesting lessons which involve them very well. Teachers know their pupils well, have high expectations and encourage pupils to work hard. Relationships between staff and pupils are very good and, as a result, pupils are very responsive to instructions, confident to ask and answer questions and offer their views. Pupils' behaviour in lessons is good overall and lessons generally keep a brisk pace.

Some parents and carers expressed concern about the staff turnover. The impact of this is most evident in the lower years of Key Stage 2. Here, teaching is not consistently strong and although some lessons are well planned and delivered there are occasions when work is not always sufficiently matched to the full ability range of the class. As a result, pupils are not always challenged to make as much progress as they can. The school has recently introduced new assessment and tracking procedures so that it is more able to identify which pupils are making expected or better progress and any who are at risk of falling behind. Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs are well supported and make at least satisfactory progress. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage make satisfactory progress overall. Where they are encouraged to try things out for themselves they react with excitement and pleasure at new skills learnt. However, as they move through this stage, there is an overemphasis on whole-class teaching which limits children's

opportunities to experiment and learn as individuals. There is not always a good balance between adult-led and child-initiated activities to support all areas of learning.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Parents and carers say that their children enjoy school and this is evident in the very low proportion of unauthorised absence, in pupils' very positive attitudes to learning, and in the confident way that they respond to staff and to each other. Pupils know the difference between right and wrong and can articulate their views very clearly. Their spiritual awareness is enhanced by music, drama and opportunities in personal, social and health education, to reflect upon their own feelings and the needs of others. There is a rich cultural mix represented and celebrated within the school population in a way that promotes tolerance and harmony. Pupils extend their knowledge and awareness of different lifestyles and cultures, as well as public services and institutions, through different projects, assemblies and whole school events, often held elsewhere because of space limitations in school. From an early age, pupils learn to take responsibility for the resources they use in class and at play, and demonstrate an increasing ability to share these and to negotiate. Older pupils carry out their responsibilities as sporting and team captains diligently and take very seriously the decisions about which charity to fund-raise for each year. The school supports pupils' acquisition of the key skills of numeracy and literacy effectively and pupils become skilled users of information technology, further developing skills which will support their future economic well-being. Those who are thinking about the next stage of their education feel well supported. The school council has only recently been formed and has yet to settle into its role as a pupils' representative. A few pupils rightly expressed the view that they could have a greater say in how they feel about school and in any changes which are planned.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

The school makes good provision for ensuring the welfare, health and safety of all pupils. As one pupil wrote, 'I love going to school because it feels safe.' Procedures for the recruitment and vetting of staff are secure. Child protection arrangements are clear and are implemented effectively. All staff have been trained at the appropriate level to fulfil their child protection responsibilities. A good number of staff are trained in first aid and the arrangements for fire and other emergencies are sound. New and up-to-date risk assessments are in place for teaching, external areas and for educational visits. Pupils are kept safe in and around the school premises. There is an appropriate plan in place which demonstrates how the school intends to further improve facilities, including fulfilling its duties under the Equality Act 2010. The personal, social and health education curriculum promotes different aspects of healthy living well. Children in the Kindergarten enjoyed exploring healthy foods and making porridge. The school would like to do more to encourage pupils to walk or cycle to school but this is limited by the risks posed by the nearby road and school

access. The school does what it can to provide all groups of pupils with opportunities for outdoor play and learning although this is somewhat limited by the useful outdoor space available. It rightly has plans in place to improve this further over the coming year.

Suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors

The school appropriately checks all staff and others to ensure their suitability to work with children. It maintains the required single central register in line with requirements. Leaders are aware of their responsibilities with regard to ensuring that the appropriate checks are carried out when employing teaching, instrumental or sports staff on a regular basis.

Premises and accommodation at the school

The school's listed building status and designation as a Bronze Age site of interest impose some restrictions on any developments. The premises are adequate and meet regulatory requirements. However, they are not always best suited to the different age groups and plans are rightly being made to improve these as far as possible within regulatory and building constraints. Nevertheless, as a result of work that has been done so far, the buildings and grounds provide attractive teaching accommodation and sufficient areas for play. Furniture, fittings and classrooms are all suitable for the age range of the pupils and the school overall provides a safe and welcoming learning environment.

Provision of information

Almost all parents and carers who responded to the questionnaire were happy with the school and the information they receive. A very small number would like a swifter response to their concerns or queries. All policies and related information are provided, or made available, in line with requirements. Details of academic performance and progress during the preceding school year have been missing since 2009 but are now provided.

Manner in which complaints are to be handled

Procedures for dealing with complaints are available on request and are compliant with the regulations.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The proprietor has ensured that the school meets all The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010, schedule 1 ('the Regulations').

What the school could do to improve further

While not required by regulations, the school might wish to consider the following points for development.

- Ensure that the recently introduced approach to assessment consistently enables activities to be closely matched to pupils' abilities, skills and knowledge so that all are challenged to make as much progress as they can.
- Ensure that a good balance of adult-led and child-initiated activities supports all areas of learning so that children make the best possible progress as they move through the Early Years Foundation Stage.
- Extend opportunities for pupils to say how they feel about school and their learning and to be involved in plans for future developments.

Inspection judgements

outstanding	good	satisfactory	inadequate
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The quality of education

Overall quality of education			✓	
How well the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of pupils		✓		
How effective teaching and assessment are in meeting the full range of pupils' needs			✓	
How well pupils make progress in their learning			✓	

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

Quality of provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development		✓		
The behaviour of pupils		✓		

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

The overall welfare, health and safety of pupils		✓		
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School details

School status	Independent		
Type of school	Primary		
Date school opened	1993		
Age range of pupils	3–11 years		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 73	Girls: 77	Total: 150
Number on roll (part-time pupils)	Boys: 5	Girls: 4	Total: 9
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational needs	Boys: 0	Girls: 0	Total: 0
Number of pupils who are looked after	Boys: 0	Girls: 0	Total: 0
Annual fees (day pupils)	£6,570 – £7,155		
Address of school	Harwood Hall, Harwood Hall Lane Corbets Tey, Upminster Essex, RM14 2YG		
Telephone number	01708 220117		
Email address	office@oakfieldsmontessorischool.org.uk		
Headteacher	Wendy Holland		
Proprietor	Cognita Group of Schools		

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.

10 February 2012

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Oakfields Montessori School, Upminster RM14 2YG

Thank you for helping inspectors to learn about your school. We really enjoyed our visit. It was good to meet you and to see how well you are doing. I am writing this letter to tell you what we found.

Oakfields Montessori School provides you with a satisfactory education which helps you to make satisfactory progress overall in your learning. Some of you make very good or outstanding progress. There is a good range of things for you to do both in and after school and the breakfast club provides many of you with a good start to the day. It was good to see how much you enjoy using the spaces you have to play and work in. However, I appreciate that sometimes you feel a bit squashed and would like more room, especially for performances. I know that your headteacher has plans to improve the accommodation as far as possible. We were very impressed by how much you all contribute to school life but we agree with those of you who feel that you could have more of a say in school life and what is planned for the future.

Good relationships contribute to you feeling safe and well supported in school. Many of you told us about how much you enjoy learning in different subjects and we could see that this is so in many of your lessons. However, we think that some lessons are not always as well planned or delivered as they could be and we have asked your headteacher and the staff to look at this so that there is less variation in future. You can help by telling your teachers when you do not understand or when you think your work is too easy for you.

The children who attend the Kindergarten and Reception classes really enjoy coming to school. It is important that staff encourage the children in these classes to explore and learn on their own as well as in more formal lessons so that they have the best possible start to their school career.

I hope that you will continue to try hard and do well in the future.

Yours sincerely

Anne Duffy
Her Majesty's Inspector