

# Oxford Montessori Schools (Forest Farm)

Forest Farm, Elsfield, Oxford, Oxfordshire, OX3 9UW

**Inspection dates** 12–14 March 2013

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>2</b>
Pupils' achievement	Good	2
Pupils' behaviour and personal development	Good	2
Quality of teaching	Good	2
Quality of curriculum	Good	2
Pupils' welfare, health and safety	Good	2
Leadership and management	Good	2

## Summary of key findings

### This school is good because

- The school is led and managed well. The senior leaders know exactly how to further improve the school. They inspire the staff to work together towards their ambitious vision, which is to secure the best outcomes for all pupils.
- Pupils achieve well over time owing to good teaching and a broad and balanced curriculum. Teachers' high expectations and the mostly effective teaching methods enable pupils to make good progress in their learning.
- Throughout the school, pupils develop self-discipline and self-confidence in a nurturing environment and take responsibility for their learning. Their behaviour is good overall and often exemplary.
- Pupils' welfare, health and safety are safeguarded well. Pupils enjoy the warm, family atmosphere created by the school. They know how to keep safe and healthy.
- Parents, carers, staff and pupils are very positive about the school's work.

### It is not yet outstanding because

- Although senior leaders monitor the quality of teaching rigorously, this has not prevented a very small minority of lessons being adequate rather than good or outstanding.
- In the adequate lessons, teachers' methods result in the pupils being too passive and not developing skills and understanding as well as they could.
- Pupils' understanding of cultural traditions present in multicultural Britain is not outstanding because it is not supported by practical contacts with people from these different cultural traditions.

### Compliance with regulatory requirements

- The school meets schedule 1 of The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010, as amended by The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2012 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements.

## Information about this inspection

- The inspection was carried out with half a day's notice.
- The inspector observed 10 lessons taught by eight different teachers. Meetings were held with senior leaders, teaching staff and pupils. Documentation and policies, particularly relating to safeguarding, welfare, health and safety were scrutinised, as well as curriculum plans, teachers' assessments, pupils' work and examinations results.
- The inspector also took account of the responses in nine questionnaires completed by staff and 22 on-line questionnaires (Parent View) completed by parents and carers.

## Inspection team

Michèle Messaoudi, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

## Full report

### Information about this school

- Oxford Montessori Schools (Forest Farm) is an independent day school for pupils aged from two to 16 years. It is one of a group of three schools run by a private partnership. The proprietors are also the principals of the school.
- The school opened in January 2000 and it is located in a rural setting outside the village of Elsfield, north east of Oxford. Children come from Oxford and the surrounding area and move on to a wide range of schools locally and abroad.
- Forest Farm is registered to provide full day care for children and includes a holiday play scheme and out of school provision for up to 70 children at any one time from 8.30am until 5.30pm on weekdays all year round, with the school being open during term times. It does not use alternative provision.
- There are currently 70 pupils on roll aged between three and 16 years.
- There are 30 children aged from three to five years and 25 attend part time.
- Of the 24 pupils in the primary department and the 16 pupils in the secondary department, 10 attend full time in each department. A number of pupils are part home educated. In the primary and secondary departments, pupils are taught in two mixed-age classes.
- There are no pupils with statements of special educational needs but the school has identified pupils with dyslexia and non-specific learning difficulties.
- The school aims to be a small family-based community of children, parents and teachers committed to an educational environment based on children's developmental needs. It was last inspected in October 2010.
- The provision for children under the age of three was not part of this inspection as it is inspected separately.

### What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Address the weaknesses in teaching in the few lessons where pupils become too passive and do not have the opportunity to practise skills and use recently acquired knowledge.
- Ensure that the good quality evidence from the monitoring of teaching is used effectively to ensure that all teaching is outstanding.
- Help pupils' understanding of the ethnic diversity of the United Kingdom to become outstanding by providing pupils with the opportunity to meet more people from different cultural traditions.

## Inspection judgements

### Pupils' achievement

**Good**

Pupils' achievement is good and most pupils make good progress in relation to their varying starting points. In the Nursery, children make good, and often outstanding, progress towards the early learning goals, particularly in their personal, social and emotional development and in their knowledge and understanding of the world. Excellent guidance from the staff, combined with a very inviting learning environment, helps them to become confident and competent self-learners. From the primary department onwards, pupils acquire good reading, writing, mathematical, communication and scientific enquiry skills. Pupils of all abilities demonstrate a love of reading. They have consistent opportunities to develop their speaking skills and rehearse their thinking and learning, which help them to make good progress in their writing and in other areas of the curriculum. In the primary department, pupils apply a wide range of skills through project work; in the secondary department, they do so through class work and workshops. Pupils benefit from individualised attention in small teaching groups and from specialist teaching in many subjects. Those who have dyslexia or non-specific learning difficulties are supported well through one-to-one sessions with a specialist teacher and also make good progress. By the end of Key Stage 4, pupils achieve good GCSE and IGCSE results in a wide range of subjects, including English and mathematics.

### Pupils' behaviour and personal development

**Good**

Pupils' behaviour and personal development are good. Pupils enjoy school and when asked what could be done to improve it, they reply, 'Nothing really, we like it as it is.' They say that they appreciate its relaxed atmosphere, its rural location and its small size which enables teachers to give them individual attention. By establishing warm, nurturing relationships within a consistent setting of clear boundaries, and respecting the child's autonomy and choices, the staff help to promote self-discipline in children from the Nursery onwards. Most pupils' behaviour is exemplary in class and around the school. Those few pupils who find it difficult to maintain the expected high standards of conduct have made good progress in managing their behaviour since joining the school. Pupils demonstrate good attitudes to learning through their sustained concentration and their high levels of participation in class activities.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good overall. Their spiritual, moral, and social development is strong. Pupils confidently express their views to the school and feel listened to. Pupils' capacity for asserting their views and solving problems in a socially acceptable way was exemplified by Nursery children negotiating amongst themselves on what to play. They used convincing arguments to promote their ideas and respected and accepted each other's decisions when they could not have their way.

Pupils get along very well with each other, feel free from harassment and none are isolated. They are courteous, helpful and friendly. They have numerous opportunities to contribute to school life and have a strong sense of community; for example, they care for the cats, chickens and ponies that live on the school site. They make presentations in assembly and participate in school drama productions, which foster their self-confidence. They contribute well to the wider community, for example by making things to raise funds for charity or writing to the Prime Minister about the wastage of natural resources.

The curriculum as a whole and enrichment activities ensure that pupils' cultural development is good overall. The Create after-school club makes a strong contribution to pupils' social and creative skills. Pupils learn about some religious festivals celebrated in Britain and around the world and about aspects of world religions. However, their understanding and appreciation of the diversity of beliefs and cultural traditions present in multicultural Britain are not outstanding because they are

not supported by practical contacts with people from these different cultural traditions.

### Quality of teaching

**Good**

Teaching is good overall, with a high proportion of lessons that is outstanding to a small minority that is only adequate.

Good teaching is underpinned by good subject knowledge, a thorough understanding of pupils' individual needs, abilities and aptitudes and high expectations of what pupils can achieve. The planning of activities is based on thorough assessments of individual pupils' learning. Lessons or sessions are conducted at a swift pace that sustains pupils' interest. In the Nursery, all staff routinely engage children in conversation, which helps children to sustain an activity long enough to learn from it and to develop excellent communication skills. Staff use their close observations of children's learning to make wise decisions about whether to intervene or not. Consequently, children's independence is promoted extremely well.

Throughout the school, teachers challenge pupils well through probing questions that deepen their understanding of the subject matter. Where the teaching is outstanding, questions are pitched at various levels to challenge pupils of all abilities and are used consistently to encourage pupils to apply effort to arrive at the correct answer. In these lessons, resources are used very effectively to match pupils' needs closely and pupils can measure their success against specific criteria. Occasionally, the teaching is no better than adequate when the teacher supplies some answers or talks for too long instead of eliciting responses from the pupils. At those times, pupils become passive learners and only make adequate progress. In other instances, overly long introductions leave just enough time for pupils to practise skills and use recently acquired knowledge by working through the main tasks, but insufficient time to deepen their understanding or further develop their skills.

Teachers monitor individual pupils' progress rigorously and respond swiftly to their needs by re-grouping them judiciously and adapting the curriculum. Pupils gain a good understanding of what to do to improve their work through constructive verbal and written feedback, detailed academic reports and the setting of learning targets.

### Quality of curriculum

**Good**

The curriculum is good. It is broad and balanced, highly individualised to meet the needs of all pupils and prepares pupils well for their future. In the Nursery, the curriculum successfully combines the Montessori approach and the Early Years Foundation Stage framework. The staff skilfully guide children through a learning environment designed to nurture their natural curiosity and develop a wide range of skills while discovering the world around them. Children have easy access to an excellent range of indoor resources and, since the last inspection, the use of the outdoor spaces has much improved to interest and challenge children's learning and development in all areas.

Throughout the primary and secondary departments, the curriculum includes all National Curriculum subjects and pupils learn French from the age of five. Secondary pupils enjoy the recent introduction of film studies. The planning of the curriculum is personalised and based on teachers' continuous assessments to ensure that pupils progress well in their learning. The curriculum is suitably modified to respond to pupils' needs and fluid grouping of pupils enables the more able to accelerate their progress and the less able to receive targeted support.

The curriculum places great emphasis on hands-on experiences and equipping pupils with practical life skills throughout the school. In the Nursery, for example, children learn to grind oat grain which they will use to make flapjacks. Older pupils make costumes for their drama performances and are involved in repairing fences and planting trees. Cross-curricular links between subjects and

topics make pupils' learning coherent. Throughout the school, pupils routinely use computers for research.

Personal, social, health and enterprise education makes a strong contribution to pupils' personal development. By running a Fairtrade café, pupils develop organisational, financial and enterprise skills and develop the qualities required to become responsible citizens. Primary and secondary pupils develop teamwork and leadership skills when taking part in annual residential visits. In the secondary department, pupils receive effective careers advice and experience the workplace through a wide range of placements. The curriculum is greatly enriched by a wide range of educational visits and activities that support pupils' academic progress, personal and cultural development extremely well.

### **Pupils' welfare, health and safety**

**Good**

The school makes good provision for pupils' welfare, health and safety and now meets all the regulations for independent schools, which is a significant improvement since the last inspection. Parents and carers have full confidence in the school's ability to keep their children safe, to promote high standards of behaviour and to deal effectively with bullying. Pupils report that they feel safe, well looked after and that bullying is practically non-existent. Safeguarding arrangements are robust.

All the required checks are carried out on the proprietors, staff and volunteers to ensure their suitability for employment. These checks are properly recorded in a single central register. The essential policies and procedures aimed at safeguarding children's welfare and eliminating risks are implemented consistently and reviewed regularly. These include the policies for child protection, health and safety, anti-bullying and behaviour. Emergency evacuation drills are carried out once a term as required. All staff, including the teachers with overall responsibility for child protection, have received the appropriate level of training at the required levels, and a sufficient number have first aid qualifications suitable for the age range.

Staff are skilful at supervising pupils closely without constraining them. This results in a calm, orderly and relaxed environment in which pupils can develop self-control and learn to keep safe through practical experience, for example when using tools and computers, and when playing outdoors in the natural rural setting. Sanctions in the rare instances of bad behaviour are properly recorded. From the Nursery onwards, pupils are encouraged to eat and drink healthily and they have daily opportunities to exercise vigorously indoors and outdoors.

### **Leadership and management**

**Good**

Leadership and management are good. The senior leaders inspire staff to realise their ambitious vision and consistently communicate their high expectations. All staff create a positive ethos that fosters pupils' independence, good behaviour, good personal development and high achievement.

The school continuously improves its provision as a result of accurate self-evaluation that is formalised in a useful management plan. Actions are concerted and the senior leaders challenge each other effectively. Careful identification of priorities for improvement ensures that the quality of teaching and of pupils' achievement has been sustained since the last inspection. Through observations of lessons and pupils' work, and discussions with staff, pupils, parents and carers, the senior leaders have a secure overview of the quality of teaching and learning in the school. However, this good knowledge of teaching quality has not prevented a few lessons from being adequate rather than good or outstanding.

The school has established very close partnerships with parents, carers and pupils, and consults them on a broad range of issues. The vast majority of parents and carers feel well informed of their children's progress and development. An online system to access teachers' daily assessments,

currently available to secondary pupils and their parents and carers, is soon to be extended to the primary department. As a result of the latest survey of pupils' views, the school has agreed to introduce Spanish as an alternative to French and a GCSE information and communication technology course in the near future.

The premises meet requirements. They provide clean, very attractive and homely indoor teaching accommodation, as well as spacious outdoor areas that enable effective and safe learning. New facilities to expand the curriculum are close to completion. Parents, carers and others have access to the full range of information to which they are entitled, through the school website and handbooks. A clearly written complaints policy meets all requirements to manage complaints fairly and promptly.

The proprietors have ensured that all independent school standards are met.

## What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	A school which provides an exceptional quality of education and significantly exceeds minimum requirements.
Grade 2	Good	A school which provides a high quality of education that exceeds minimum requirements.
Grade 3	Adequate	A school which meets minimum requirements but needs to improve the quality of education it provides.
Grade 4	Inadequate	A school where minimum requirements are not met and/or the quality of education has serious weaknesses.



## School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	132048
<b>Inspection number</b>	410541
<b>DfE registration number</b>	931/6119

This inspection was carried out 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.

<b>Type of school</b>	Day Montessori nursery, primary and secondary
<b>School status</b>	Independent school
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	2–16 years
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	70
<b>Number of part time pupils</b>	45
<b>Proprietors</b>	Daniel Ardizzone and Judith Walker
<b>Principals</b>	Daniel Ardizzone and Judith Walker
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	March 2010
<b>Annual fees (day pupils)</b>	£8,162 – £9,229
<b>Telephone number</b>	01865 352062
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