

Oakfields Montessori School

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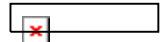
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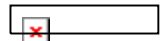
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Introduction and summary

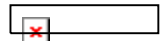


Purpose and scope of the inspection



This inspection was carried out by the Office for Standards in Education under Section 163 of the Education Act 2002 in order to advise the Secretary of State for Education and Skills about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

Information about the school



Oakfields Montessori School is an independent day school for pupils aged 3 to 11 years of age. It was established eleven years ago, initially on two sites. The school occupies an attractive, listed mansion house and out-buildings set in landscaped grounds which provide a variety of areas for play and contemplation. The school provides after-school care for pupils until 5pm if required.

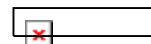
The school has 21 pupils attending part-time and 20 pupils who attend full-time, all aged under five. There are 152 pupils on the roll in total. Most of them come from towns and villages within a five-mile radius of the school.

Oakfields Montessori School is founded on the ethos established by Maria Montessori, which aims to provide:

'A happy community that promotes learning, where children are proud of their achievements and develop a positive attitude to their work.'

The school aims to ensure that pupils have a rich educational experience which helps them to develop intellectually, physically, morally and spiritually as they become self-aware and respectful young people.

Summary of main findings

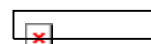


Oakfields Montessori School is a good school. It provides a curriculum which is well matched to the pupils' needs. The youngest pupils, in the nursery and kindergarten classes, develop very effectively positive attitudes towards their work. They also acquire social and physical skills which form a firm foundation for applying Montessori principles in their later learning. In the reception class and Key Stage 1, these skills are applied through the Foundation Stage areas of learning and the National Curriculum, which is developed successfully in Key Stage 2.

The quality of teaching is good: conscientious and detailed planning effectively includes the assessment of pupils' attainment and of their progress. Overall, pupils' achievement is very good. Their behaviour is a major strength of the school as is their moral, social and cultural development.

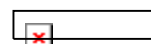
Pupils' welfare, health and safety are very consistently promoted by adults and pupils alike and are also a major strength of the school. The quality of accommodation is good.

What the school does well



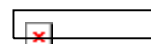
- it builds successfully on its Montessori philosophy to promote a happy learning community;
- it promotes pupils' behaviour extremely effectively and encourages respect for one another as well as mutual consideration between adults and pupils;
- it provides pupils with very clear and well understood moral awareness, social skills, and sensitivity and respect for other cultures;
- it successfully supports pupils' welfare, health and safety; and
- it enables pupils to achieve high standards.

What the school must do in order to comply with the regulations

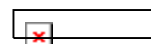


- The school complies with all the requirements.

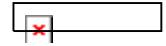
Compliance with the regulations for registration



1. The quality of education provided by the school



The quality of the curriculum

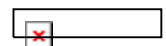


The quality of the curriculum is good and integrates successfully Montessori practices and the Foundation Stage areas of learning with the National Curriculum. Curriculum policies are implemented effectively and are supported by comprehensive schemes of work and teaching plans. In the nursery and kindergarten classes, there is a strong emphasis on developing mathematical understanding, speaking and listening, and personal and social skills through play.

The curriculum is well organised, with an emphasis on developing a breadth of skills, knowledge and understanding. A core element is the Montessori philosophy, in which experiences are designed to develop the whole personality of the child. Pupils learn to accept responsibility for their behaviour, to contribute to the life of the school and to develop their awareness of the needs of others as well as their own self-confidence. This emphasis on developing pupils' social awareness and skills, beginning in the nursery and kindergarten classes, encourages them to transfer those skills into a positive approach to learning across the curriculum. The curriculum is enriched by a number of themed days, a wide range of extra-curricular activities and drama productions which provide pupils with a wealth of interesting yet challenging experiences. The extra-curricular activities include judo, art, British Sign Language, chess, French, dance, drama, cookery, choir and orchestra. Pupils are also taught French and Spanish, with opportunities to increase their understanding of other languages through topics or whole school projects.

Teachers plan cross-curricular topics to help pupils make connections in their learning. Personal, social and health education (PSHE) and religious education (RE) are usually taught in blocks following particular themes. There is effective specialist teaching of a range of sports and foreign languages, and instrumental tuition. The school also makes full use of residential trips and visits to the local area and other places of interest, such as the Bethnal Green Museum of Childhood, to support curriculum projects and provide experiences beyond the classroom. The curriculum is adapted appropriately to support pupils with special educational needs following careful assessments carried out by the skilful specialist staff.

The quality of the teaching and assessment



The quality of teaching is good. All teaching is at least satisfactory and the majority is good or better. Staff know their pupils extremely well and relationships are excellent throughout the school, building on the vision and leadership of the headteacher. Pupils are highly motivated and have an enthusiastic approach to learning, usually maintaining their concentration for a considerable length of time. In the nursery and kindergarten classes particularly, the Montessori approach enables pupils to choose activities and persevere with them over a sustained period. They work hard and respond with interest to questions posed and challenges presented to them. Pupils make very good progress at each stage of their education as the staff provide a carefully structured and well-planned programme for teaching and learning. For example, the pupils in the kindergarten class greatly enjoyed the experience of using a tray filled with shaving foam to develop their sensory awareness as well as their descriptive language skills.

The staff work collaboratively to provide the pupils with consistent support for their learning. They make very effective use of their expertise to reorganise groups and provide specialist teaching. There is a good ratio of staff to pupils throughout the school and in the classes of younger pupils this ensures that they receive the necessary intensive support for their early learning. The classrooms are organised very effectively with an appropriate range of resources to help pupils learn in all subjects. The recently refurbished computer suite includes an interactive white board and

is used very effectively to develop pupils' skills in information and communication technology across all areas of the curriculum. This was shown by a Year 4 class which used an art programme to produce Japanese-style paintings as part of a geography project. The school is particularly good at supporting pupils with special needs through additional help in class, in small groups or individual work. The staff are committed to developing pupils' particular gifts and talents.

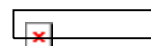
In the most successful lessons, there is an interesting introduction which builds on previous learning and gives pupils the opportunity to develop independence by having to make decisions about their approach to the task. This is then followed by a review of their learning before discussion on what they are going to learn next. In a Year 3 class observed, pupils were working on the use of first and third person in the story of 'The Three Billy Goats Gruff'. They had to decide on which character they were going to be and had the freedom to develop the story independently as long as they fulfilled the learning objectives. There is a lively pace to most lessons and pupils respond as eager, diligent and enthusiastic learners. They have frequent opportunities for practical learning beyond the good practice in the early years, as seen in a Year 6 class where pupils carried out a scientific fair test on the solubility of sugar in water of varying temperatures.

Regular use and careful analysis of the school's own assessments and external tests ensure that pupils' work is planned at the right level. They are assessed thoroughly in the Foundation Stage using the Stepping Stones towards the Early Learning Goals. Staff have high expectations of the pupils and they work hard to achieve their best. Pupils are rewarded for their efforts and achievements through carefully targeted praise and use of the house point system. They take a pride in their work, being careful to write neatly and to show how well they can do. The quality of marking throughout the school is consistently high with clear statements on the strengths of a piece of work and what needs to be done next. With the younger pupils in particular, this is complemented by oral feedback. Staff use their knowledge of individual pupils to enable them to build on previous learning and use appropriate levels support. This was shown very effectively in the reception class where pupils worked individually with the teacher on addition and subtraction of numbers using small white boards. Good use is made of homework to develop the older pupils' individual research skills and to support learning in the classrooms. Parents are conscientious in supporting their children's work at home, often making very useful comments in the reading diaries. Parents receive a comprehensive annual report on their children's progress.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

2. The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils



Provision for the moral, social and cultural development of pupils is a major strength of the school: that for spiritual development is satisfactory. The Montessori philosophy seeks to foster a sense of order, developing basic skills and respect for others. In the nursery and kindergarten classes, the carefully consistent approach lays strong foundations for later work based on its motto of 'Caring and Sharing', and the attitudes of all pupils demonstrate the school's success in these aspects.

Pupils' spiritual development is enhanced in RE lessons, for example, when a good discussion about Hinduism drew upon the experience of one pupil as well as the knowledge the class had gained from previous work. Assemblies include the school prayer and extend the spiritual dimension into moral, social and cultural areas.

During the inspection, a 'Geography Day' involved classes from Year R to Year 6 each looking at aspects of one country, including their languages, with Greek, Japanese, Xhosa, Spanish, French as well as English being introduced through song and the spoken word. National foods were sampled and the pupils gained awareness of other cultures and societies, developing confidence in

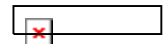
discussing them. In Year 1, pupils were introduced to counting in Spanish, quickly linking some of the words to their knowledge of numbers in French without being prompted by the adults. In the nursery, pupils are made aware of English, French and Urdu forms of writing.

Pupils' social and moral development is also fostered extremely effectively through the PSHE programme, taught in Key Stages 1 and 2 and linked with education in citizenship. It also forms the basis of much of the organisation of the school out of classes. Thus, Year 5 pupils have a 'friendship club' with younger ones at playtimes and the school prefects have lunch with lower junior and infant pupils. Pupils are also encouraged to take responsibility through the house system, as prefects, captains of sports, librarians and the recently developed school council. Throughout the rest of the school, including the nursery classes, monitors for the day are given the opportunity to take a lead role.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

3. The welfare, health and safety of the pupils



Provision for the welfare, health and safety of its pupils is a strength of Oakfields Montessori School. There is a caring family atmosphere and relationships are excellent. There are detailed policies to promote the health and safety of pupils both in school and when on visits. The school demonstrates the Montessori commitment to developing self-control and awareness of the needs of others through its behaviour, discipline and anti-bullying policies. The headteacher is a trained child protection officer and ensures that all adults are fully aware of these issues by sharing information and using the school's clear policy.

The school keeps and monitors thorough accident, incident and First Aid records as well as maintaining information on particular health needs of pupils. The majority of staff have a First Aid qualification which is regularly updated. There is a comprehensive fire safety procedure in place and the fire authority monitors the school's risk assessments every four years. Regular fire drills are held and documented accurately. All fire appliances are checked annually. Pupils are always properly supervised in the classrooms and when using the outside play areas.

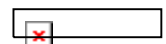
Attendance is very good with few incidences of unauthorised absence. The school's admission register complies fully with the regulations.

The school has recently devised a plan to show how, over the next three years, it can be made more accessible to pupils with disabilities.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

4. The suitability of the proprietor and staff



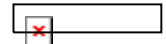
All staff have appropriate checks to ensure their suitability to work with children. Rigorous systems are in place to check the professional expertise of staff prior to appointment through evidence from

previous employers, character references and professional qualifications. All staff are suitably qualified and/or experienced to teach the Montessori method. The school also employs a number of qualified specialist staff to support the enriched curriculum.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

5. The suitability of the premises and accommodation

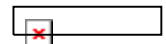


The school occupies a large Grade II listed mansion house in seven and a half acres of gardens. Additional out-buildings house part of the pre-preparatory school, the school hall, offices and a swimming pool. Accommodation is generally good and has been thoughtfully allocated to the present purposes, despite the inevitable constraints of working in a listed building. Specialist accommodation such as the computer suite is very good. Classrooms are well maintained, and furniture is in good condition. Provision for the nursery age pupils meets the legal requirements. The grounds are used very effectively to support the pupils' learning, and risk assessments have been made regarding vehicle access. The proposed additional parking and drop-off area will ease vehicle movement near to the nursery at the start and end of the day. There are appropriate restrictions on vehicles entering the grounds at other times.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

6. The quality of information for parents and other partners



The school has recently updated the information provided to parents and other partners and meets fully the requirements for registration.

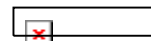
It provides a good range of information including a clear statement about its policy for Montessori education. Regular newsletters are sent out, as are annual reports on pupils. Information on academic performance is provided for parents and other partners, but due to the small numbers of pupils, this information is not published. Details of all school policies and procedures, including the complaints procedure, the Foundation Stage curriculum and that for older pupils, are available on request.

Parents expressed their strong overall support for the school, noting that their children enjoyed it.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

7. The effectiveness of the school's procedures for handling complaints

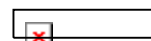


The school's policy and procedures were established in September 2003. They have been updated and meet the requirements for registration in full.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

School details



Name of school:	Oakfields Montessori School		
DfES ref number:	311/6061		
Type of school:	Pre-school and Primary		
Status:	Independent		
Age range of pupils:	3 - 11 years		
Gender of pupils:	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils):	Boys 64,	Girls 67,	Total 131
Number on roll (part-time pupils):	Boys 11,	Girls 10,	Total 21
Annual fees (day pupils):	£1,932 - £4,995		
Address of school:	Harwood Hall Harwood Hall Lane Corbets Tey, Upminster RM14 2YG		
E-mail address:	office@oakfieldsmontessorischool.org.uk		
Telephone number:	01708 220117		
Fax number:	01708 227911		
Headteacher:	Mrs K Malandreniotis		
Proprietor:	Oakfields Montessori Schools Ltd		
Lead Inspector:	Mrs Susan Wheeler		
Dates of inspection:	31 January - 3 February 2005		

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