

Oxford Montessori Schools

Independent School

Inspection report

DfES Registration Number	931/6119
Unique Reference Number	132048
Inspection number	301583
Inspection dates	6-7 June 2007
Reporting inspector	Martin Bradley HMI

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 162A of the Education Act 2002 (as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005).

SIE ONLY:

This inspection of the funded nursery education was carried out under Schedule 26 of the School Standards and framework Act 1998.

This inspection of the day care was carried out under the Children Act 1989: Part XA (as introduced by the Care Standards Act 2000) and, where funded nursery education is provided, under Schedule 26 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998.

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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, 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

Oxford Montessori Schools' Forest Farm provision is one of a group of four settings run by a private partnership. It aims to be a small family based community of children, parents and teachers committed to an educational environment based on children's developmental needs. The school has 74 pupils aged between 2 and 10 years currently on roll. It is open from 0830 until 1530 on weekdays all year round, with the school being open during term times. It follows the Montessori approach in its philosophy and curriculum, seeking to encourage a broad range of independent life skills as well as balancing social and emotional learning with academic work. It has three democratic groups: the children, who are encouraged to take part in school decision making, including staff appointments, the parents' group, and the management and leadership group. The school 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.

The school inspection took place at the same time as the inspection of care and nursery education, and this report contains the findings of both inspections. It was the first time the school had received both types of inspection.

Evaluation of the school

This is a satisfactory school with several particularly good features. The overall curriculum is satisfactory; that in the Children's House (Nursery and Reception) is particularly good. Children's House staff work very effectively to promote children's social and personal skills as well as their learning using Montessori practices and the Montessori curriculum. Individual children are carefully encouraged and supported to develop their potential and to acquire skills which underpin their future learning. Concentration, speaking and listening in group sessions, as well as the frequent use of counting and number games all support this work and enable the children to make good progress. In the elementary classes individual children often work at their own pace and, whilst their knowledge and skills develop, these are not sufficiently rigorously applied and extended in creative and practical situations. Their progress is satisfactory in relation to their individual capabilities.

Quality of education

The quality of the curriculum is satisfactory overall; however it is particularly good in the Children's House classes (Nursery and Reception). In those classes, staff have a very clear view of Montessori practices, their purposes and how to implement them using the Montessori curriculum along with a range of practical experiences to apply and extend the children's learning. They encourage the children to develop good attitudes towards their play and learning. Concentration is particularly well developed. Planning is by the Early Learning Goals and the Stepping Stones which lead into these. Assessments are good, making use of the Foundation Stage Profile. In the Children's House, the children make good progress; skills of reading, writing and number are encouraged rather than being directly taught. Within the overall structure of each session, the children have several opportunities to come together as a group to discuss a theme – in one lesson wood lice had been found and a story was very effectively used to support discussion of their environment, eating habits and life. The children were closely interested in the theme, asking appropriate questions and listening to one another's comments and replies. At other times they are encouraged to develop independence in choosing activities from the wide range available, selecting and clearing these away when the task is completed. Here the role of the adults as supporters and facilitators for the learning is skilfully used to ensure that the children remain engaged or are redirected to new tasks when one has been completed. This highly skilled level of adult awareness and teaching is reflected in the discussion of themes arising throughout the school day: it led to work looking at the number of nationalities in the children's backgrounds in the oldest Children's House class where 11 nationalities were identified in the class of 20, with languages and greeting phrases being discussed. The quality of teaching in the Children's House is good and occasionally outstanding.

In the elementary classes, Years 1 to 5, the work has a different emphasis. Each child has an Individual Education Plan (IEP). This identifies on a weekly, termly and annual basis work to be considered based on the Montessori curriculum organisation. The IEPs are often brief and do not have sufficient indications of the ways in which the proposed work will be related to the child's individual learning needs or how teaching approaches will be modified to meet individuals' needs. Much of the curriculum, especially in the language, mathematical and cultural areas, uses published Montessori materials as well as teacher made cards and worksheets. Teachers also prepare lesson plans for specific pieces of work, such as public speaking, developing a fabric collage or preparing an assembly. These are useful plans which generally contain evaluation comments. Taken overall, this curriculum is satisfactory. Assessments are recorded in individual progress monitoring documents, although these note themes and aspects covered rather than consistently making detailed comments providing evidence of the child's learning as well as what should be covered next. Published reading tests have been used in both elementary classes for the last two years. Overall the elementary classes' curriculum provides a good range of themes which are well supported by trips outside school. However many children make relatively slow progress, and their skills in completing comprehension

and computation exercises are insufficiently used in other work such as creative writing and applied number work where their achievement is lower. As many of the children have identified additional learning needs and/or difficulties, their individual achievement is satisfactory. The quality of teaching in the elementary classes is satisfactory: one of the teachers was absent during the inspection, her place being taken by another member of the school staff. In many of the lessons seen, the children worked at a slow pace and whilst the staff supported their work, this did not provide sufficient challenge to extend the investigations or to develop individual thinking and analysis.

Good use is made of peripatetic teachers to extend the curriculum. These include Tai Chi, group and individual music lessons, drama, art and horticulture. A range of languages have been provided, generally on the basis of a term's work. At the time of the inspection spoken and written Mandarin, linked to Chinese culture was being taught by a native Chinese teacher.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

The quality of provision for children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. They have good attitudes towards their work, although at times this can be relatively undemanding in the elementary classes. Their behaviour is generally good, and they show good consideration for one another. They are being prepared for their future economic well being, showing good self confidence and an ability to work with one another. The opportunities for them to apply their basic skills in practical situations are limited at times. They have raised funds for a range of charities, and a sponsored walk and a picnic to celebrate the Montessori centenary will take place shortly. Work done recently on South Africa in the elementary classes and on the range of nationalities in the Children's House has developed their broader cultural awareness.

Welfare, health and safety of the pupils

Welfare, health and safety are satisfactory overall: several aspects are good. The school meets almost all of the regulations and its written policies are generally implemented effectively. The school's promotion of healthy eating is supported by the parents by lunch boxes and in the fruit provided for children's birthdays. The school grounds provide organic produce. Pupils are kept safe overall and they are well aware of personal safety issues. Good use is made of trips and risk assessments are made. The school does not yet meet the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

The school makes appropriate checks on staff prior to their taking up appointments. Teachers' job descriptions have recently been revised to ensure that these fully

reflect the school's approach to Montessori work as well as noting that the school provides Montessori workshops and training.

School's premises and accommodation

The school occupies former farm premises in a rural setting with about eight acres of land. This is being developed for the school's use along with a barn which will form a sports and activity centre. A coppice wood of 2,000 trees has recently been planted. As a small school the arrangements for children who are unwell are adequate, but specific provision will be needed if the numbers of children increase. The premises are satisfactory overall: good use is made of the outdoor areas.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

The school seeks to work as a democratic organisation and provides parents with good information about its work. A parents' group meets monthly to support the school's work. School policies are posted at the entrances and the school brochure sets out its philosophy. Annual reports are provided. These are detailed documents which indicate the work covered and any aspects which posed difficulties.

Procedures for handling complaints

There is a complaints policy which addresses the regulations' requirements for dealing with informal complaints, but it does not detail the procedures for dealing with written complaints.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school meets all of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as amended January 2005, with the exception of those listed below.

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of procedures for handling complaints (standard 7) and must:

- provide for the establishment of a hearing before a panel appointed by the proprietor of at least three people who have not been directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint (paragraph 7 (f))
- ensure that one person on the panel is independent of the management and running of the school (paragraph 7(g))
- allow parents to attend the panel hearing and, if they wish, to be accompanied (paragraph 7(h))
- provide for the panel to make findings and recommendations, and stipulate that the complainant, proprietors, headteacher and, where relevant, the

person complained about, should be given a copy of any findings and recommendations (paragraph 7(i))

- provide for written records to be kept of all complaints indicating whether they were resolved at the preliminary stage, or whether they proceeded to a panel hearing (paragraph 7(j))
- provide that correspondence, statement and records of complaints are to be kept confidential (paragraph 7(k))

In order to comply with the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 2002 the school should devise a three-year accessibility plan.

What the school could do to improve further

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

- ensure that the curriculum is consistently developed in all classes to meet the school's aims of individualised education for all children.
- raise the standards achieved by children in the elementary classes through more challenging teaching and detailed assessment.
- review safety procedures especially in the outdoor areas.

Inspection of day care registered by Ofsted

Effectiveness of the registered day care

The quality of care is good. The outcomes for being healthy, staying safe, enjoying and achieving, positive contribution and organisation are good. The setting meets the needs of the range of children for whom it provides. Children settle well when they arrive and quickly engage themselves in their chosen activities. Children play in pleasant and comfortable surroundings and use resources of high quality that present good challenges. Staff give attention to individual children and systems are in place to support children with learning difficulties or disabilities.

The staff ensure good standards of hygiene are in place throughout the day though some documentation linked to recording accidents and administered medicines lacks detail. Children gain positive messages about healthy living and they enjoy nutritious snacks and regular refreshments. They value the time outdoors in the extensive gardens where they find challenging equipment to develop their physical skills. Overall staff have suitable regard to safety though some outdoor play times are not so well organised to promote safety and enjoyment for all ages. Children's behaviour is good with staff providing respectful and caring role-models.

The staff work closely with parents to find out any relevant issues that may be important to the health and welfare of the children. The staff are well organised during the day and work together as a team. They plan the day with care and ensure all regulatory documentation is in place. Staff have a confident understanding of the area of child protection.

There have been no complaints about the day care made to Ofsted since registration. The provider is required to keep a record of complaints made by parents, which they can see on request. The complaints record may contain complaints other than those made to Ofsted.

Recommendations or actions to improve the registered day care

To improve the quality and standards of the care the registered person should take account of the following recommendations:

- obtain parental signatures to be sure they are informed if a child receives medication or has an accident
- organise outdoor play times carefully to ensure children's safety and enjoyment

Inspection of funded nursery education

Effectiveness of the funded nursery education

The quality of teaching and learning is good. Staff achieve a successful balance between the Montessori aims of the school and the promotion of the Foundation Stage. The children benefit from a stimulating and wide range of opportunities with a good emphasis on developing their awareness of the natural world. Staff plan the classroom areas carefully and they ensure that all areas of learning are taken into consideration. Daily plans are flexible to enable children to follow their own interests. Staff monitor the children's progress towards the early learning goals effectively and records indicate that children make good progress along the stepping stones. Photographs and written observations build a personal picture of each child's development and the information is shared with parents.

The children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is fostered. Throughout the year the children learn about the festivals and celebrations of others with some interesting events like welcoming Tibetan monks to the setting. Children enjoy learning about the world around them with topics and colourful displays that encourage use of the senses. Children use a wide variety of tools with confidence though they do not currently access information technology and programmable resources.

Children are building friendships and they play co-operatively, building large constructions together or sharing an imaginative game. They are progressing well with all aspects of literacy and mathematics in the nursery classes. Children can move on at their own pace and staff support their interests. Children are motivated to select activities for themselves and express their creative flair with access to a good range of resources.

The leadership and management of the nursery are good. The staff have a positive attitude to improvement and they work together to bring about changes to benefit the children. The partnership with parents and carers is good. The successful links built between home and the setting enable the adults to work together to support children effectively.

Recommendations or actions to improve the funded nursery education

To improve the quality and standards of the nursery education the registered person should take account of the following recommendations:

- extend the opportunities for children to use information technology and programmable toys to support their learning

School details

Name of school	Oxford Montessori Schools		
DfES number	9316119		
Unique reference number	132048		
Unique reference number (funded nursery education)	EY 337584		
Type of school	Montessori		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	January 2000		
Age range of pupils	2-12		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 38	Girls: 36	Total: 74
Number on roll (part-time pupils)	Boys:	Girls:	Total:
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need	Boys: 0	Girls: 1	Total: 1
Number of children receiving day care	Boys: 4	Girls: 21	Total: 25
Number of children receiving funded nursery education	Boys: 12	Girls: 24	Total: 36
Annual fees (day pupils)	£ 6,314.40		
Address of school	Forest Farm Elsfield Oxford Oxfordshire OX3 9UW		
Telephone number	01865358210		
Fax number	01865358211		
Email address	oms.schools@btconnect.com		
Headteacher	Ms Judith Walker		
Proprietor	Mr Daniel Ardizzone, Ms Judith Walker		
Reporting inspector	Martin Bradley HMI		
Child Care inspector	Jill Milton		
Dates of inspection	6-7 June 2007		