

Oakfields Montessori Schools Limited

Independent School

Inspection Report

DCSF Registration Number	3116061
Unique Reference Number	102361
Inspection number	329566
Inspection dates	23 September 2008
Reporting inspector	Sue Hall

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). The inspection of childcare was conducted under Section 49(2) of the Childcare Act 2006.

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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 Children, Schools and Families about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

This was a light touch inspection (LTI) which focussed principally on the quality of education provided by the school; its provision for the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development; the arrangements for safeguarding pupils and the improvements the school has made since its last inspection.

Information about the school

Oakfields Montessori School is an independent day school near Upminster in Essex, registered to take pupils from the age of three to eleven. The school was opened by its proprietor / headteacher in 1995 and occupies a listed mansion house and out-buildings set in seven acres of attractive grounds. It aims to provide a broad curriculum founded on the ethos established by Maria Montessori. The school also provides after school care for pupils until 17:00 if required. In the last year, the school changed hands and is now part of the Cognita Schools group. A new headteacher took up the post this month. There are currently 75 boys and 93 girls on roll. While there is a small number of pupils with additional learning needs, none require higher levels of support. The school was last inspected in 2005.

Evaluation of the school

Oakfields Montessori School offers a satisfactory quality of education. Following recent changes, the school is in a transitional stage with many areas identified by newly appointed senior staff for further improvement. The school meets most of the regulations for independent schools and has made satisfactory improvement since the last inspection. Provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good and behaviour is outstanding. The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. Pupils are valued and encouraged well so that they and their parents identify how much they like school and are happy here.

Quality of education

The curriculum provided is satisfactory. In the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) it is broadly based on the Montessori principles, and as the pupils move through the school the curriculum is largely based on the National Curriculum, in particular in English, mathematics and science. There is also additional teaching of music and sports. Schemes of work are broad and balanced and cover most subjects. National guidelines are followed to support planning and teaching of the core subjects especially, literacy and numeracy. In the teaching of English there is a focus on

grammar, comprehension and reading. In mathematics and numeracy the curriculum is focused on developing number and shape, space and measures, but does not fully develop the pupils' investigative and problem solving skills. The curriculum is enriched successfully by the teaching of information and communication technology and French from Kindergarten upwards.

Curriculum planning is satisfactory overall. This takes account of the needs of most pupils, enabling them to make satisfactory progress in their learning and acquisition of basic skills. However, many activities are not structured to meet the diverse needs of all learners, especially in extending the more able. There is an adequate range of extra curricular activities and off-site visits. Satisfactory arrangements are in place for pupils to receive guidance for the next stage in their education. However, opportunities to develop a full range of creative, investigative and thinking skills are limited at present.

The quality of teaching and assessment is satisfactory. There are clear strengths in the manner in which staff and pupils interact. Staff are warm and supportive in their relationships with pupils, valuing their ideas and contributions to the range of activities. This encourages all pupils to have a go at new areas of work, knowing that help is always at hand if they find learning difficult. The management of pupils is good which ensures lessons are conducted in a calm and purposeful manner. Teachers generally explain things well to pupils and clearly expect them all to work hard.

Staff use questions to check what pupils know, understand and can do in a satisfactory manner. Many of the more articulate and confident pupils enjoy this and answer enthusiastically, although a few do not offer their ideas, or are encouraged to do so, on a regular basis. There are few well planned activities where pupils can discuss their ideas with a partner in order to ensure they are all actively involved in the lesson or to extend their vocabulary even further.

The planning of lessons is satisfactory but often very brief. This does not always identify exactly specifically what the pupils are to learn during the lesson. Most activities are planned for the whole class or group and do not always take account of the wide ability range within each. Staff collect a satisfactory range of assessment information of the progress each pupil makes but, this is not always used to best effect to organise linked, but different, activities for those of a range of abilities. Those pupils with learning difficulties are often supported in class or work in separate groups with additional staff. This enables them to make at least satisfactory progress. While the level of challenge for activities is satisfactory overall at times this could be even higher for the most able pupils so they progress as well as they can.

Occasionally, lessons include practical activities that pupils enjoy and learn much from, as noted in their vivid description of dissecting an animal's heart. However, practical activities are not a regular feature and some classrooms are very small which hinders such work. In many lessons, activities are linked to the use of text books and worksheets that do not inspire the pupils much and which restricts the development of problem solving skills across the curriculum.

Many of the staff are long serving and very experienced in working with pupils of this age. There is a mix of those who are Montessori trained and those with higher level teaching qualifications. Staff demonstrate satisfactory knowledge of the subjects they teach. Relatively small classes and additional staffing enable them to offer extra help, which is important if pupils are struggling.

As a result of the satisfactory curriculum and teaching they receive the pupils make satisfactory progress which coupled with often high levels of natural ability evident on entry to the school enables many to attain high standards. Pupils achieve satisfactorily and do well in teacher assessments at the age of seven and national tests at the age of eleven. This helps equip them well for their future.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

Provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good as is attendance. Pupils' personal development is a strength and pupils enjoy school. The school's Montessori ethos underpins the emphasis given to the pupils' social development. Relationships are good throughout the school, and pupils and staff relate very well with each other. The pupils mix well together and they are all valued for the contribution they make to the school. The behaviour of the pupils is outstanding. They participate positively in lessons, are polite, responsive and are very willing learners. Pupils are suitably prepared for the next stage of education.

Pupils are taught to distinguish right from wrong both within lessons and throughout the day. All staff instil a good moral code and the pupils respond to this in a very positive way. Pupils are encouraged to be mindful of others developing tolerance and understanding and to take on roles and responsibilities within the school and wider community. They learn about other cultural traditions and public institutions through their lessons, topics and whole school events. Overall the school encourages good appreciation of and respect for, pupils' own and other cultures.

Spiritual development is satisfactory. Times for reflection are evident in a limited way in assemblies, but the pupils' spiritual development is not consistently evident in lessons.

Safeguarding pupils' welfare, health and safety

The school provides satisfactorily for pupils welfare, health and safety. There are many pastoral strengths because the staff know and care for the pupils well in lessons and associated activities. The school has many good quality policies that are reflected in day-to-day procedures. The school is benefiting from the support of the Cognita Schools group in terms of over-arching policies. The school complies with the Disability Discrimination Act 2002 with a clear three-year plan to improve access.

Staff show a very obvious commitment to pupils personal development and welfare. However, there are gaps in several key areas in both policies and day-to-day routines. The age and layout of the building and extensive grounds create many challenges for the staff to overcome to ensure pupils are looked after well enough. The current facilities for children who are ill are inadequate and do not meet the regulations. While a log exists of sanctions taken following behavioural concerns this has not been used for several years and fails to meet requirements.

The school has procedures for external specialists to carry out risk assessments of the buildings and the grounds but these are not sufficiently detailed or extensive. During the inspection of the school areas of concern were identified to the headteacher including the storage of non-educational materials in the grounds which present hazards for the pupils. The maintenance of the grounds, whilst broadly satisfactory, is not rigorous in identifying and addressing areas that could cause accidents or raise concerns. These issues impact on the welfare, health and safety of all pupils, including those in the EYFS and after school care group.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

The effectiveness of the EYFS is satisfactory overall. Children make satisfactory progress in their learning. Personal development and well-being are good. Behaviour is outstanding, and most have a good understanding of how to stay safe. Children adopt good hygiene habits, and understand the benefits of physical activity and exercise. They enjoy their learning, are motivated and always willing to take part in what is going on around them.

Children enter school with standards above expectations for their age, and make satisfactory progress in most areas of learning. However, while progress is satisfactory overall there is a wide variation in the progress made by children of different abilities, especially the more able. This is mainly due to the fact that several activities do not challenge these children. The quality of planning is satisfactory. However, this is not sufficiently detailed to ensure that each child receives an appropriate, challenging and extending experience across all areas of learning. While there are opportunities for creative and outdoor play these sometimes lack impact and are not sufficiently vibrant or imaginative.

The welfare of the children is satisfactory. Arrangements for safeguarding pupils are adequate. The nursery is equipped to a satisfactory standard, although some equipment is a little old. The leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage provision are satisfactory, although there are few opportunities for those in leadership roles to monitor and evaluate the quality of provision.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school meets most 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 provision for pupils' welfare, health and safety (standard 3) and must:

- Check that all risk assessments of the school building and grounds identify concerns and ensure that staff take immediate action to address these (paragraph 3 (4)).
- Ensure that the school keeps written records of sanctions imposed upon pupils for serious disciplinary offences (paragraph 3 (8)).

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of the premises and accommodation (standard 5) and must:

- Provide appropriate accommodation for children who are ill (paragraph 5 (l)).

In order to comply with the welfare requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage the school must:

- Ensure that all risk assessments of the school building and grounds identify concerns and check that immediate action is taken to address these (paragraph 3 (4)).

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:

- Improve curriculum planning in order to provide more practical and problem solving activities.
- Improve the quality of teaching and learning by making better use of assessment information to further challenge all groups of pupils.
- Provide more opportunities for pupils to discuss their ideas and play an active part in their learning.

Inspection Judgement Recording Form

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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The quality of the Early Years Foundation Stage provision

How effectively are children in the Early Years Foundation Stage helped to learn and develop?			√	
How well do children achieve in the Early Years Foundation Stage relative to their starting points and capabilities?			√	
How good are the personal development and well-being of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage?			√	
What is the quality of welfare, health and safety of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage?			√	
How effectively is the provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage led and managed?			√	
What is the overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage including, where relevant, the quality of childcare?			√	

School details

Name of school	Oakfields Montessori Schools Limited		
DCSF number	3116061		
Unique reference number	102361		
Type of school	Independent Day School		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	29 July 1995		
Age range of pupils	3-11		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 75	Girls: 93	Total: 168
Number on roll (part-time pupils)	Boys: 6	Girls: 3	Total: 9
Annual fees (day pupils)	£ 2,520 - £6,495		
Address of school	Harwood Hall Harwood Hall Lane Corbets Tey Upminster Essex RM14 2YG		
Telephone number	01708220117		
Fax number	01708227911		
Email address	office@oakfieldsmontessorischool.org.uk		
Headteacher	Mrs Elaine Hill		
Proprietor	Cognita Group of Schools		
Reporting inspector	Sue Hall AI		
Dates of inspection	23 September 2008		