

Oxford House School

Independent School

Inspection report

DCSF Registration Number	881/6030
Unique Reference Number	115424
URN for registered childcare and social care	EY359281
Inspection number	332448
Inspection dates	2–3 December
Reporting inspector	Sue Hall

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as amended. 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, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

The inspection of registered provision¹ was conducted under Section 49(2) of the Childcare Act 2006.

Information about the school

Oxford House School is an independent day school for boys and girls from two to eleven years of age. The school is located in a large and extended detached house in Colchester. It is non-selective in the early years but pupils are internally assessed for entry into Years 2 to 6. The school was established in 1959 and became part of the Cognita group in 2006. There are 126 full time pupils at the school. There are two children under three years of age and 29 aged three to five, all of whom receive nursery education funding. The lower Nursery for the youngest children operates in morning times only, five days a week. The school aims to *'understand and to develop the potential which all children possess and to send them on to senior schools as literate, numerate, well mannered and happy individuals'*. About one in five children speak English as an additional language, being mostly of Indian or Chinese heritage. There is a low number of pupils with additional needs and none with a statement of special educational needs. The school prepares pupils for entry into independent and maintained secondary schools. The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) was inspected in September 2007 and the whole school was last inspected in January 2002. A new headteacher took up post in October 2008.

Evaluation of the school

The Oxford House School provides a satisfactory education for its pupils, which is slightly below the schools own evaluation of its effectiveness. They make satisfactory progress because teaching and assessment are generally sound, as is the curriculum. The school cares well for the pupils' day to day needs and most enjoy being part of the school community. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good, as is their behaviour. The school has made satisfactory progress in completing the recommendations from the previous inspection. The school meets most but not all of the regulations.

¹ Schools which provide childcare for children from birth until the term in which they reach their third birthday must register this provision separately with Ofsted.

Quality of education

The curriculum is satisfactory and is effectively planned to make sure that the school meets its aims of preparing pupils for secondary education; it has a strong focus on English and mathematics. As a result, skills of literacy and numeracy are learned well. The curriculum policy is used as a basis for planning and for assessing that pupils have covered all the areas of learning that are required. The exception is information and communication technology (ICT) as, although pupils have a taught session each week, they infrequently use computers to support their learning. The curriculum for personal education is satisfactory. It is taught through subjects such as science and religious education and teachers make time to discuss issues of a personal nature that may arise. Pupils indicate that they enjoy mathematics most as the subject is taught using practical activities, which they say is not the case in other subjects. Extra-curricular activities are adequate, although a number of parents registered concern at the limited range that is available.

The teaching and assessment of pupils' progress is satisfactory, but variable. Most pupils enter the school with skills and knowledge that are above the expectations for their age. They make satisfactory overall progress and in some areas, and especially in Years 4 and 5, where teaching is most effective, this is good. However, in other years teaching is not as strong as it might be because staff do not make full use of assessment information to provide work that is well matched to pupils needs. Nevertheless, when they leave the school standards are above average. Pupils who speak English as an additional language make similar progress to their classmates. Good skills in literacy and numeracy and satisfactory skills in ICT prepares pupils well for their future lives.

Parents have confidence in the teachers because the school provides an education that they note has the traditions and values that they like. Relationships between staff and pupils are generally good and the school is an orderly community. Pupils generally listen well and try hard and most lessons proceed at a satisfactory pace. Most teachers have satisfactory subject knowledge and often explain carefully to the pupils what they have to do. Staff often provide extra help, explanations and information to those who find learning difficult so that they are able to make progress. However, on too many occasions, teachers plan the same or very similar activities for the whole class, including those of different abilities. This does not always meet the needs of those who struggle with their work or those who find learning easy. Some pupils indicate they find some activities boring and repetitive, including when they have to copy from the board or work from text books. There are too few opportunities for them to follow a line of enquiry and conduct experiments or solve problems. Some staff miss opportunities to enable pupils to discuss their ideas or take part in drama or role-play activities across the range of subjects to enthuse and motivate them even more.

Teachers have satisfactory knowledge of the individual progress pupils make over time. In the last two years staff have introduced end of year assessments that

provide data which identifies the gains made in English, mathematics and reading. However, other on-going assessments are informal. Adults regularly give pupils verbal feedback about how they can improve their work and many provide written guidance too. The school rightly recognises there is scope to extend assessment procedures to a more regular programme of checks in order to identify where further progress can be made. Subject leaders are at an early stage in developing their roles in supporting progress.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

The provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good overall and as a result, many pupils leave school as confident young citizens. Spiritual development is satisfactory, assemblies contribute well to spiritual development, although there are few examples of lessons promoting a sense of wonder about the world. Moral and social development is good and pupils are thoughtful and responsive to one another. Older pupils care for younger ones, such as at lunch where they clear tables or in corridors where they ensure that the younger ones feel safe. Pupils contribute well to the school community by taking part in whole school events and assuming responsibilities in class and the school. The school council plays an important role and has influenced activities such as introducing basketball and netball and enabling pupils to use the gardens. The council is too reliant on teachers to run meetings but takes notes in order to feedback to their classes. Cultural development is satisfactory. Pupils learn about other cultures such as the Chinese New Year and Diwali and all pupils can choose whether or not to say the Lord's Prayer in assemblies.

Most pupils enjoy school because of their friends and teachers and they like being part of a small school where they know everyone. This is seen in the high attendance rate. The behaviour of most pupils is good although on occasion, when pupils are not challenged by their work, they become bored and engage in mildly disruptive behaviour. Many pupils understand the need to eat a healthy diet and explain the reason for the school having vegetarian meals as due to respecting the views of different cultures and to protect the planet. Pupils say that they feel safe and all can name an adult they would trust if they had a personal problem.

Welfare, health and safety of the pupils

This provision is satisfactory. Teachers are clear about procedures for child protection as all have attended recent courses. Staff generally care for the pupils, as seen in wet play and lunchtimes when teachers stay in their rooms with their classes to supervise activities. However, there are health and safety concerns which have developed over several years and need to be addressed. Pupils wear socks around the school and this risks injury by slipping or stepping onto a sharp object and by walking on cold and sometimes damp floors. The youngest children use toilets without doors and are visible to older children, which does not give them the privacy

to which they are entitled. The school meets the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 2002 but potential access by physically disabled pupils or parents is very limited. While most school policies are appropriate they do not make clear the sanctions to be applied should there be any misbehaviour.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

The school makes thorough checks on the suitability of all staff to work with pupils of all ages, including staff in the EYFS. The school holds this information on a single central register. However, there are areas including of medical checks and previous employment history where more information is required to meet current regulations.

School's premises and accommodation

The premises and accommodation enable children in the EYFS and other pupils from Years 1 to 6 to learn in a safe environment with regular checks for example, upon the water supply and electricity. The buildings are clean and well maintained. However, while classrooms are attractive learning environments, some are small and limit the organisation of practical activities. There are well advanced plans to remodel some of the rooms used for specialist teaching. This includes the ICT suite, the music room, the art / science room and accommodation for the EYFS. Particular attention is being paid to extending computer resources which are currently limited in number and to identifying how these can be used in day-to-day activities in the classroom. There is a small room for looking after children when they are ill but there is no hot water in some washbasins for staff and pupils. The outdoor areas are small for the number of pupils but provide for active play and quieter areas. There is a separate outdoor area for the lower Nursery, which is under used by all the EYFS children.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

Parents are given adequate and up to date information about the school through newsletters and the information for parents' booklet and prospectus. School procedures are clear and parents have the opportunity to ask the school for further information including concerning staff qualifications.

Procedures for handling complaints

The school complaints procedure is clear, although a few parents commented that they do not know how to access information about complaints as this is not explained in the handbook or prospectus.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

The school makes satisfactory provision for meeting the needs of children in the EYFS. Children are well known and cared for by the staff in an attractive and safe environment. Children behave well. They are happy in school and enjoy making friends, working and playing with their classmates. Parents are pleased with the quality of education and care provided and like the traditional and formal way activities are organised.

Children in the EYFS make satisfactory progress because teaching, assessment and the curriculum are generally satisfactory. Those who speak English as an additional language make good progress in communicating with others. Children enter from just after the age of two with varying early learning experiences. Overall on entry their skills, knowledge and understanding are above average for their age. This is especially in their personal and social development and in their speaking and listening skills.

Much of the planning for the EYFS children is based upon Montessori principles, which is successful in developing basic skills. However, the school's heavy emphasis on language and literacy and mathematical development is at the expense of a broad and balanced curriculum that encompasses all the required areas of learning for this age group. There is a limited range of activities and little time allocated to some areas. Children do not independently access arts and crafts materials, sand, water and role-play resources. Similarly there is limited access to materials for mark making or designs and therefore development of creativity and imagination are restricted. Children's knowledge and understanding of the world is not given sufficient priority and there are no opportunities for the children to use computers. Whilst most of the resources are of good quality some of the reading books for children in Reception are very old and do little to motivate children.

The planning of lessons is satisfactory but in some aspects is limited. Written plans are brief, not clearly referenced to national guidance and do not always indicate the next steps in learning. Some of the planning lacks clarity in identifying what the children are to learn and how this will meet the needs of those of different abilities. Staff record the children's progress and development in individual records. However, information from the checks on progress is not always used well enough to plan and provide imaginative and stimulating activities that meet the range of needs.

The provision is managed and led in a satisfactory manner with a newly appointed team leader. There are well advanced plans to reorganise the grouping of children to make better use of the accommodation and resources, including the outdoor areas. The staff are very confident and enthusiastic in their approach. However, at times self-evaluation can be overly generous and more remains to be done to ensure that activities fully meet the requirements for children of this age. While some of the staff are suitably qualified not all hold appropriate qualifications and the school is carefully checking the regulations to ensure it complies with such. While there has been some

training for staff this has not been extensive and there have been few opportunities for them to visit other settings to identify the exact quality of provision and where improvements could be made.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school meets all of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as amended ('the Regulations'), 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:

- ensure that the policy for promoting good behaviour sets out the sanctions to be adopted in the event of pupils mis-behaviour (paragraph 3(2)(d)).

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of suitability of proprietor and staff (standard 4) and must:

- ensure that prior to confirmation of the employment of all staff that appropriate checks have been carried out to confirm medical fitness and previous employment history (paragraph 4(2)(a)).

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

- ensure that there is privacy for children using the toilets and that there is hot water in hand-basins for children and staff (paragraph (5)(k)).

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of the provision of information for parents, carers and others (standard 6) and must:

- ensure that a written statement of sanctions to be adopted in the event of any misbehaviour is produced (paragraph 6(2)(h))
- ensure that parents may request information about the qualifications of the staff employed at the school (paragraph 6(2)(k)).

The school's registered provision for childcare meets the requirements of the Childcare Act 2006.

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 health and safety of the pupils is secured by wearing suitable footwear at all times.
- Improve the quality of planning and teaching for children in the EYFS to provide a better range of open-ended activities that support their learning in all appropriate areas.
- Extend the procedures to check and track the progress made across the school in order to identify exactly the achievement of each pupil.
- Improve the quality of teaching by using assessment information to provide a range of interesting activities that meet the needs of those who make different rates of progress.

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	Oxford House School		
DCSF number	881/6030		
Unique reference number	115424		
EY URN (for registered childcare only)	EY359281		
Type of school	Primary School		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	1959		
Age range of pupils	2–11		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 66	Girls: 60	Total: 126
Number on roll (part-time pupils)	Boys: 2	Girls: 2	Total: 4
Number of pupils aged 0-3 in registered childcare provision	Boys:1	Girls: 1	Total: 2
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need	Boys: 0	Girls: 0	Total: 0
Number of pupils who are looked after	Boys: 0	Girls: 0	Total: 0
Annual fees (day pupils)	£6810		
Annual fees (childcare)	£6105		
Address of school	2 Lexden Road Colchester Essex CO3 3NE		
Telephone number	01206576686		
Fax number	01206577670		
Email address	info@oxfordhouseschool.net		
Headteacher	Mrs K Golding		
Proprietor	Cognita Schools Limited		
Reporting inspector	Sue Hall		
Dates of inspection	2–3 December 2008		