

Oxford Montessori Schools

Independent school inspection report

DCSF registration number	931/6119
Unique Reference Number (URN)	132048
URN for registered childcare and social care	EY337584
Inspection number	344577
Inspection dates	10 March 2010
Reporting inspector	Mark Lindfield HMI

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Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out by Ofsted under section 162A of the Education Act 2002¹, as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005², 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 provision³ was conducted under Section 49(2) of the Childcare Act 2006.⁴

This was a light touch inspection which focused 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

Oxford Montessori Schools' Forest Farm provision is one of a group of three settings run by a private partnership. The school opened in January 2000 and currently has 72 pupils aged between 2 and 16 years on roll. 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 08.30 until 17.30 on weekdays all year round, with the school being open during term times. There are currently 74 children on roll for the day care facility, 16 of whom are in receipt of nursery education funding; four are under-3s. There are no pupils with statements of special educational needs. 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 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. 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 was inspected previously in June 2007.

Evaluation of the school

Oxford Montessori Schools Forest Farm provides a good standard of education and is successful in meeting its aims. Teaching and assessment across the school are consistently good so that pupils make good progress. Relationships across the school are good and pupils respond well to this friendly environment, behave well and

¹ www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2002/ukpga_20020032_en_14#pt10-ch1-pb4-l1g162

² www.opsi.gov.uk/ACTS/acts2005/ukpga_20050018_en_15#sch8

³ 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.

⁴ www.opsi.gov.uk/ACTS/acts2006/ukpga_20060021_en_4#pt3-ch2-pb4-l1g49

display positive attitudes in lessons. Pupils show good levels of independence, work well together and make strong contributions to the life of the school which ensures that they make good gains in their spiritual, moral and social development. The school fails to meet a number of regulations. The provision for pupils' welfare is inadequate because the arrangements to safeguard pupils lack rigour. Checks made on the suitability of staff other than those in the Early Years Foundation Stage are insufficient. Since the last inspection, the school has improved the complaints policy and procedures, instigated links with a local college and produced a three-year plan that meets the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act. In seeking to extend the curriculum for older pupils, the school has opened a design and technology classroom. However, this fails to meet some aspects of the regulations.

Quality of education

The school's curriculum for all pupils, including those in the Early Years Foundation Stage, is good; its foundations derive from Montessori principles and practices which provide the core elements and it is allied to the National Curriculum where appropriate. The school's communication with parents and carers is strong; they are kept well informed about their children's work and progress through the school's effective use of information and communication technology. The curriculum provides well for pupils' personal and social development and is enhanced by a suitable range of trips and visits. There are detailed education plans for each pupil in the Early Years Foundation Stage and in the elementary class for pupils in Years 1–5. These are used well by staff to ensure good progress and a smooth transition between classes. Interesting displays and activities promote the pupils' natural curiosity, such as those on the solar system and plant growth in the elementary classes.

The curriculum is adapted to meet the needs of pupils of all abilities, with specialist teachers providing opportunities for pupils to participate in physical education, music, drama, art, environmental science and, more recently, design and technology. Pupils' scientific knowledge and understanding is good across the school with several pupils attaining good GCSE results in physics, chemistry and biology. Pupils are introduced to French in the elementary class. The majority of senior pupils in Years 7–11 are educated at home and attend part time to access individual subjects. Senior pupils have an increasing range of examinations to choose from. The school has initiated links with a local college to further develop careers advice and provide further guidance to older pupils.

Teaching and assessment are good across the school. The quality of teaching in the Early Years Foundation Stage and elementary class is consistently good. As a result, children get off to a good start and their good progress continues as they move into the elementary classes in Years 1-5. The wide range of accessible and vibrant resources in these classes helps to motivate and engage pupils. Staff show care and concern for pupils and this increases pupils' confidence and encourages them to become independent from an early age. Teachers use questions well to challenge and to extend individual pupils' use of key concepts and their understanding. Pupils

show good attitudes to their work because of the good relationships that exist across the school. The quality of teaching across the senior school has some clear strengths. For example, in music lessons, good use is made of information and communication technology to engage and motivate pupils and to deal sensitively with issues of race and culture. Occasionally, opportunities are missed for senior pupils to apply their mathematical and writing skills in subjects other than mathematics and English.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

The school's friendly ethos and approach to learning ensures that pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Pupils enjoy their time at the school and respond well with good levels of attendance. Pupils make a strong contribution to the running of the school through class discussions to resolve any problems that arise. These discussions include personal, social, health and emotional issues on a regular basis and provide pupils with an appropriate awareness of public bodies and institutions. Pupils are involved in making choices from the time they enter the Early Years Foundation Stage and this helps them to develop a strong moral sense of right and wrong. Pupils' cultural development is good; it is enhanced by projects on religious festivals and by selling fair trade food products from around the world. However, their understanding and appreciation of the wide range of cultural influences in modern Britain is less well developed.

Pupils' behaviour is good and they show positive attitudes in lessons, enthusiastically participating in group work and sharing resources from an early age. Older pupils provide good role models for younger pupils and relationships are good. As one pupil stated, 'At this school, both teachers and the children respect me.' Pupils know their strengths and weaknesses and are encouraged by staff to get the most out of their time at the school. This is particularly applicable for many senior pupils who, through their increased levels of confidence and ability to articulate their opinions, are better prepared for their future adult lives.

Safeguarding pupils' welfare, health and safety

The arrangements for the welfare and safeguarding of pupils are inadequate. The school's procedures for recruiting new staff and vetting volunteers prior to their appointment are applied with insufficient rigour. As a result, there are inconsistencies in the checks made on staff who have lived or worked outside of the United Kingdom and the school's register of checks made on staff is incomplete. The school has sought to extend the curriculum provision with new facilities for teaching design and technology. This classroom contains a range of electrical equipment that lacks the appropriate safety checks; the protective clothing is not suitable for all of the pupils that are using the equipment. Standards of lighting, heating and ventilation in the room do not meet requirements.

Arrangements to monitor the procedures for fire safety are in place and fire fighting equipment is checked annually. Staff show care and consideration for pupils in their

day-to-day relationships. They have attended appropriate training in first aid, fire fighting and child protection. The school's promotion of healthy eating is supported by parents and carers who provide healthy lunch boxes and by the fruit provided for pupils. The school has made suitable provision and compiled appropriate plans to ensure that it meets the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

The overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage and the quality of its leadership and management are good. Staff have a good partnership with parents and carers who say they are very happy with their children's early years education. Children settle very quickly as there are effective induction procedures. Staff are excellent play partners; they seize opportunities to engage with the children and to successfully promote their language development. Children's day-to-day welfare is paramount to all staff and appropriate safeguarding procedures are in place in the Early Years Foundation Stage. The under-3s in the after-school club are sensitively and carefully supported. Children enjoy a healthy drink and snack after school and look forward to walking to feed the school's chickens, ponies and the peacock.

A lively indoor curriculum provides numerous practical activities such as printing with fingers, playing board games and building with large-size blocks. However, there are limited resources for information and communication technology to enhance children's learning. Children clearly find learning fun and enjoyable; for instance, they were captivated by some hibernating snails which they had collected on a recent walk. The immediate outdoor area provides limited opportunities for children to develop across all areas of learning other than their physical, social and emerging writing skills.

The Early Years Foundation Stage leader evaluates the strengths and weaknesses of the setting well, demonstrating a good capacity to improve the provision even further. She has devised an excellent system to seamlessly combine the Montessori environment and philosophy with the Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum. Adults use regular and ongoing assessments to plan the next steps in children's learning so that they make good progress from their varied starting points. By the time children enter Year 1, the vast majority have attained the levels of knowledge and skills expected for their age. Children with special educational needs and/or learning disabilities receive sensitive support at all times so they too achieve well and enjoy their learning.

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 provision for pupils' welfare, health and safety (standard 3) and must:

- attend to health and safety issues in the facilities and equipment provided for pupils in the design and technology classroom and ensure that safety checks are completed on all electrical appliances (paragraph 3(4)).

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

- ensure that all appropriate checks are completed prior to the confirmation of the appointment of all staff (paragraph 4(2)(a))
- ensure that all new appointments are in receipt of an enhanced criminal record check (paragraph 4(2)(b))
- ensure that staff who have lived outside the UK have further checks on their suitability to work in a school (paragraph 4(2)(c))
- ensure that the single central register clearly details the completion of the required checks for all members of staff (paragraphs 4C(2) and 4C(3)).

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

- improve the standards of lighting, heating and ventilation in the school's design and technology classroom (paragraph 5(p)).

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 all subjects provide opportunities for senior pupils to apply and improve their mathematical and writing skills
- increase the opportunities for older pupils to access careers advice and guidance and to attend work placements.

Early Years Foundation Stage

- improve the outdoor environment so that it provides interest and challenge for children's learning and development in all areas
- increase the opportunities for children to use information and communication technology and related resources such as programmable toys.

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 good are the outcomes for children in the EYFS?		√		
What is the quality of provision in the EYFS?		√		
How effectively is the EYFS led and managed?		√		
Overall effectiveness: how well does the school meet the needs of children in the EYFS?		√		

The quality of boarding provision

Evaluation of boarding provision				
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School details

Name of school	Oxford Montessori Schools		
DCSF number	931/6119		
Unique Reference Number (URN)	132048		
EY URN (for registered childcare only)	EY337584		
Type of school	Montessori		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	January 2000		
Age range of pupils	2–16		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 10	Girls: 10	Total: 20
Number on roll (part-time pupils)	Boys: 38	Girls: 15	Total: 53
Number of pupils aged 0-3 in registered childcare provision	Boys: 1	Girls: 3	Total: 4
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need	Boys: 0	Girls: 0	Total: 0
Annual fees (day pupils)	£ 7,564		
Address of school	Forest Farm Elsfield Oxford Oxfordshire OX3 9UW		
Telephone number	01865 358210		
Fax number	01865 358390		
Email address	oms.schools@btconnect.com		
Headteacher	Ms Judith Walker		
Proprietor	Ms Judith Walker Mr Daniel Ardizzone		
Reporting inspector	Mr Mark Lindfield HMI		
Dates of inspection	10 March 2010		