

School inspection report

Date 20 to 22 February 2024

Oxford Montessori Schools

Forest Farm School

Elsfield

Oxford

OX3 9UW

The Independent Schools Inspectorate is appointed by the Department for Education to inspect association independent schools in England. Our inspections report on the extent to which the statutory Independent School Standards and other applicable regulatory requirements are met, collectively referred to in this report as 'the Standards'.

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Summary of inspection findings

1. The proprietors ensure that school's leaders have suitable knowledge and expertise and carry out their roles effectively.
2. The provision for the early years in both nursery settings is caring and supportive. Children flourish in the calm environment, enjoying the richness of the learning opportunities.
3. The support for pupils who have special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) is considerable and effective.
4. Leaders have adopted an approach to the curriculum which enables the school to meet the needs of pupils. Consequently, pupils make the most of their strengths and achieve well during their time at the school. However, the range of subjects can be limited, and this can restrict the opportunities for some pupils to gain qualifications in subjects that interest them and offer them particular skills, though other subjects can be accessed through online courses.
5. Extra-curricular activities tend to be offered at lunchtimes, often because of the time at the end of the school day is used to provide further support for pupils, so there are fewer opportunities available. This means that some pupils feel they are not able to gain fully those additional skills and experiences which can arise from such activities.
6. The relationships between pupils and staff are positive and supportive, which helps pupils to feel confident in their learning environment. Pupils also have strong relationships with their peers and respect each other's differences.
7. Leaders promote a clear understanding of the need for tolerance and respect amongst pupils. In turn, this leads to pupils developing a genuine appreciation of why it is important to build an inclusive culture within a diverse community, both in school and beyond.
8. The proprietors and school leaders ensure that the school's safeguarding policy and procedures are thorough and well implemented, so that pupils are working in a safe environment and their wellbeing protected.
9. The proprietors and leaders are successful in providing a highly nurturing environment, which supports pupils exceptionally well, both within the classroom and outside. Many pupils at the school have arrived with a background of disrupted learning and little self-belief. The school takes great care to ensure that pupils regain their self-confidence and motivation to work and consequently start achieving their potential, often for the first time in their education. This is a significant strength of the school.

The extent to which the school meets the Standards

- Standards relating to leadership and management, and governance are met.
- Standards relating to the quality of education, training and recreation are met.
- Standards relating to pupils' physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing are met.
- Standards relating to pupils' social and economic education and contribution to society are met.
- Standards relating to safeguarding are met.

Recommended next steps

Leaders should:

- review the curriculum so that older pupils are provided with a wider range of subjects to choose from, in order to broaden the qualifications available to them
- extend the range of extra-curricular provision so that pupils can engage more regularly in activities beyond the classroom and develop additional skills.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

10. The proprietors understand their responsibilities and ensure that the school successfully meets pupils' needs. They review policies annually, are in school regularly and meet weekly with the school's leaders to monitor procedures. The proprietors ensure leaders have the appropriate knowledge and expertise and carry out their roles effectively. Leaders are committed fully to the Montessori ethos, as is shown in their website which sets out the particular nature of the school. They work consistently to ensure that the focus on the individual is maintained, and pupils feel directly involved in the school. Consequently, pupils can make the most of their potential, both in the classroom and in their personal development.
11. The proprietors have put secure systems in place to identify potential risks and then taking appropriate action to mitigate these, making use of external agencies, where appropriate. For example, they have taken action to mitigate any risks to pupils taking lessons in a building which is relatively remote to the main school building. The proprietors monitor individual risk assessments regularly and require a risk report termly which they then discuss with leaders. They consider all aspects of the school, including health and safety issues, financial risks, safeguarding and the safer recruitment of staff.
12. Leaders in the early years are knowledgeable and have a comprehensive understanding of the requirements for early years provision. The areas of learning are covered appropriately, and teachers plan for children's individual needs. The programme for staff supervision is fully embedded and staff engage in regular training, such as through the local authority.
13. The school's complaints policy is clear and appropriate, and available on its website. The policy is followed consistently, and suitable actions are taken in response to any concerns raised.
14. The school liaises closely with parents. Reviews and parents' meetings are held throughout the year, which provide parents with useful information on their children's progress. In addition, parents contribute to the weekly reflection review that is completed by pupils and teachers. Consequently, pupils feel they are contributing to their own learning and want to take responsibility for their own progress.
15. The proprietors and leaders fulfil their responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010. Leaders have created an inclusive and accessible environment where pupils thrive. Teaching does not discriminate against groups or individuals. There is a suitable accessibility plan in place. The plan regularly reviews both the educational provision and physical environment, such as provision for wheelchairs.
16. Leaders work successfully with external agencies to support pupils' needs, such as the local authorities who fund the education, health and care (EHC) plans of a number of pupils at the school. The school produces an annual account of funds and expenditure.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to leadership and management, and governance

- 17. All the relevant Standards are met.**

Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

18. The curriculum covers all the key areas of learning through the primary school and into the seniors, making full use of the outdoors environment for learning. From Year 9, pupils have a choice of different pathways. Some will follow GCSE courses, and some will take a mixture of GCSE and vocational courses. The school guides pupils to follow their interests and develop their strengths to choose the most appropriate pathway.
19. Leaders do not always provide the full range of subjects that pupils would like to study. This year GCSE music and geography were not available to pupils, and this potentially limits the opportunities for some pupils.
20. All pupils take GCSE examinations in the core areas of English, mathematics and science. Some pupils take additional GCSEs in other subjects whilst others complete alternative qualifications. Pupils consistently achieve well at GCSE, often exceeding expectations. Across the school, leaders monitor pupils' progress using standardised assessments. Pupils make good progress through the years.
21. Teachers in the early years know the children in their care well and have a comprehensive understanding of the early years requirements. Teachers provide an interesting range of activities that pique children's interest and meet their developmental needs. This helps them to make good progress. Children are developing a love for reading through activities such as learning phonics and reading books. Children enjoy their learning, confidently selecting their own activities as well as joining in enthusiastically during group sessions. Children sustain interest for considerable periods in their chosen activities. Children interact with their teachers and their friends well, engaging in thoughtful conversations and recalling rhymes and past experiences.
22. In the primary school, teachers employ high levels of targeted support which enable pupils to make good progress. They provide valuable verbal feedback in lessons, which pupils benefit from. Pupils are enthusiastic about their learning and progress well. They learn how to identify what they need to do to improve in each subject and work hard to do so.
23. In the senior school, teachers consistently enable pupils to acquire new knowledge and make good progress according to their ability. They support pupils well. For example, teachers often provide additional consolidation sessions and offer individual help where needed. As a result, pupils feel confident about identifying their own strengths and weaknesses and learn how they can best improve their work. Pupils are proud of their work and speak enthusiastically about their learning.
24. The school supports well pupils who have SEND. In the younger years, additional adults in classrooms help to ensure that pupils progress well and achieve their potential. Similarly in the senior school, teaching assistants are deployed thoughtfully in lessons to support pupils, both individually and in small groups. Classroom teachers are trained and empowered to adapt how they deliver the curriculum to meet individual pupils' needs. They have the physical resources they need to do this. This means that pupils, whatever the level of their needs, are working effectively, responding positively to the teaching approaches.
25. The school caters well for pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL). Teachers work with parents to support pupils' language development, including by learning key words in the child's

first language. Pupils who speak EAL quickly develop their fluency in English so that they can successfully access the curriculum.

26. There is a limited range of extra-curricular activities offered. In the senior school, clubs tend to take place only at lunchtimes because after school, the focus is on homework club, where pupils are supported by teachers in their independent work. Pupils wish for more options, so they can develop a range of skills.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to the quality of education, training and recreation

- 27. All the relevant Standards are met.**

Section 3: Pupils' physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing

28. A high level of mutual respect between pupils and staff is clearly obvious throughout the school. Across the age range, relationships are highly positive and promote positive attitudes to learning. Pupils develop high levels of self-awareness and self-understanding, both through lessons and through the weekly reviews of pupils' progress. Leader focus on developing the academic and emotional potential of each child, as an individual, including skills relevant to the outside world alongside their understanding of areas such as literacy and numeracy. This helps to ensure that pupils are ready for when they leave the school. .
29. Leaders and staff provide a highly nurturing environment which supports pupils both within the classroom and outside. Leaders and staff take great care to ensure that pupils feel confident and comfortable in school. At the end of each day, leaders and teachers meet with pupils to go through the next day's planning, so that pupils can feel comfortable and confident and are ready to return the following morning.
30. The personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) curriculum is suitably broad and balanced. It incorporates a focus on relationships education across all year groups and is delivered using age-appropriate resources. Online safety is covered comprehensively as part of the programme. Pupils are taught effectively about healthy lifestyles. They develop a strong understanding of how to maintain good health and the importance of staying healthy. The range of activities may be limited due to the facilities on site but meet the needs of the pupils in terms of promoting a sense of physical health.
31. Acting with a level of respect and tolerance that recognises differences between people and responds accordingly is a key strand of the school's ethos. Leaders have developed, with input from pupils, a code for respectful behaviour which is commonly understood and adhered to. Behaviour procedures are well known by staff and applied consistently. Pupils behave well throughout the school. Bullying is rare and is dealt with effectively when it occurs.
32. The learning environment in the early years is carefully designed in line with Montessori principles of encouraging children to develop independence and self-discipline from an early age. Teachers successfully help children to think about their emotions and how they make them feel. For example, in Nursery, children learn to use 'the feelings corner' for periods of quiet reflection. Older children have daily meditation sessions. Children are kind towards each other, and classes are calm and peaceful.
33. The proprietors and leaders monitor health and safety arrangements closely and act swiftly to tackle any issues that arise. Fire safety and evacuation arrangements are planned carefully and take pupils' individual needs into account. For example, the fire alarm is prefaced by a calm, spoken announcement alerting pupils to the alarm about to sound, demonstrating sensitivity towards pupils who find sudden loud noises difficult.
34. Teachers are always on hand to supervise pupils and look after their differing needs. The school keeps records of attendance up to date, patterns of attendance are monitored and acted upon. First aid is administered in a timely and competent manner. The records of first aid actions were seen and

were up to date. The admissions register contains all essential information, in regard to informing the local authorities when pupils leave or join the school.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to pupils' physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing

35. All the relevant Standards are met.

Section 4: Pupils' social and economic education and contribution to society

36. Leaders encourage a clear sense of tolerance and respect amongst pupils. Pupils develop a strong understanding of why it is important to build an inclusive culture within a diverse community, both in school and beyond. Through the PSHE curriculum, pupils learn about the differences between groups of people, such as religious beliefs and sexual orientation. They are taught about the negative impact of prejudice and stereotyping. For example, in Year 9, pupils explore ideas around unfairness during recruitment processes. Pupils develop positive attitudes to inclusion and celebrate diversity.
37. In the early years, the curriculum helps children to understand the world in which they live. Children in the Nursery learn about people who help us in the community through topic work and role play. They demonstrate a secure knowledge of the roles of these different people and independently engage in realistic role play conversations. Older children develop an awareness of environmental issues facing the wider world. They instigate discussions with their friends about global warming, for example, and how this affects the habitats of polar animals.
38. Pupils are prepared well for the move from the junior to the senior school. For example, pupils in Year 6 have a weekly reading sessions with older pupils, which help them to prepare for life in the senior school. Pupils value the advice and support given to them by older pupils.
39. Leaders provide tailored careers advice to match the different needs of its senior pupils. This starts in Years 8 and 9, where pupils learn about different jobs and careers. In Years 10 and 11, pupils are offered specific guidance on future training and job opportunities including apprenticeships. Pupils learn to plan for their future careers and training with guidance that meets the range of their aspirations.
40. Leaders provide valuable opportunities in the curriculum which encourage pupils to show initiative and direct their own learning. In addition, pupils are supported to develop their daily living, independence and employment skills, ready for the world beyond.
41. Pupils take part in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award (DofE) scheme. Volunteering placements are co-ordinated by the school, including working in a local allotment and at a city farm. Through these opportunities, pupils develop a greater understanding of how they can contribute positively to the lives of those living and working in the locality.
42. The PSHE programme delivers useful economic education through the year groups, at appropriate stages. Those pupils taking vocational courses in Years 10 and 11, learn to apply their financial skills to real-life situations, such as by running a charity café or undertaking market research in a local indoor market. This engagement with citizenship issues and the local community enables pupils to contribute directly to the work of charitable organisations and society more widely.
43. The school encourages pupils to think about their place in the modern world and to understand the need for laws and the structures of society, including the principles of democracy. They take part in a weekly parliament, where staff and pupils discuss current issues in the school and suggest ideas for improvement.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to pupils' social and economic education and contribution to society

44. All the relevant Standards are met.

Safeguarding

45. The proprietors monitor closely that the school's safeguarding policy and procedures are thorough and well-implemented. The designated governor for safeguarding holds regular meetings with the school's safeguarding team. Safeguarding is on the agenda for every management meeting in school.
46. Leaders keep informed of new challenges and developments, and how national trends can impact on pupils in the school. Leaders maintain a thorough oversight of the use of the internet in school, through robust filtering systems. They also require pupils to hand in their mobile phones each morning to prevent any potential misuse during the school day.
47. The school engages effectively with a range of external agencies to ensure that pupils are supported fully. Leaders prioritise pastoral care in the school. Staff are experienced in working with children's needs and potential challenges. A professional counsellor supports pupils on a regular basis.
48. Staff receive regular and appropriate training. The safeguarding lead provides training for all staff on induction. Staff knowledge and awareness of procedures is kept up to date through frequent updates and quizzes, as well as the use of online training resources. Staff liaise with each other appropriately, and relevant information is shared to ensure that pupils are carefully monitored and supported. There is an awareness of contextual issues and clear plans to mitigate any potential hazards for pupils. When concerns arise, these are handled appropriately.
49. The proprietors ensure that the record of safeguarding pre-appointment checks is maintained accurately, and that all recruitment checks on staff and volunteers are carried out appropriately. This register is checked regularly to ensure it is accurate and up to date.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

50. All the relevant Standards are met.

School details

School	Oxford Montessori Schools
Department for Education number	931/6119
Address	Oxford Montessori Schools Forest Farm School Elsfield Oxford Oxfordshire OX3 9UW
Phone number	01865 352068
Email address	admin@oxfordmontessori.co.uk
Website	www.oxfordmontessori.co.uk
Proprietor	Mrs Judith Walker and Mr Daniel Ardizzone
Chair	Mrs Judith Walker
Headteacher	Mrs Katie Townsend
Age range	2–16
Number of pupils	129
Date of previous inspection	11 January 2023

Information about the school

51. Founded in 1990, Oxford Montessori Schools is a co-educational day school on two sites. Forest Farm, in the village of Elsfield, accepts pupils aged from 2 to 16 years. The second site, at Wolvercote on the outskirts of Oxford, provides for children aged 2 to 5 years. Many pupils come to the school following difficult experiences with their previous education. The school is owned and administered by its two proprietors in a limited partnership and led by a separate principal.
52. There are 51 children in the early years, across the two sites, divided into two Nursery classes and one Reception class.
53. The school has identified 60 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities. 24 pupils in the school have an education, health and care (EHC) plan.
54. English is an additional language for 23 pupils.
55. The school states its aims are to promote the development of the whole child through individual pastoral and academic support, equipping them with essential skills through learning that nurtures creativity and a connection to nature. By facilitating active, inquiry-based learning, the school seeks to reflect the Montessori ethos of education in which pupils are encouraged to contribute their views and make informed decisions about their own learning.

Inspection details

Inspection dates

20 to 22 February 2024.

56. A team of four inspectors visited the school for two and a half days.

57. Inspection activities included:

- observation of lessons, some in conjunction with school leaders
- observation of registration periods and assemblies
- observation of a sample of extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection
- discussions with the proprietors
- discussions with the headteacher, school leaders, managers and other members of staff
- discussions with pupils
- visits to the learning support area and facilities for physical education
- scrutiny of samples of pupils' work
- scrutiny of a range of policies, documentation and records provided by the school.

58. The inspection team considered the views of pupils, members of staff and parents who responded to ISI's pre-inspection surveys.

How are association independent schools in England inspected?

- The Department for Education is the regulator for independent schools in England.
- ISI is approved by the Secretary of State for Education to inspect independent schools in England, which are members of associations in membership of the Independent Schools Council.
- ISI inspections report to the Department for Education on the extent to which the statutory Independent School Standards, the EYFS statutory framework requirements, the National Minimum Standards for boarding schools and any other relevant standards are met.
- For more information, please visit **www.isi.net**.

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