



INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

**OSWESTRY SCHOOL
INTERIM INSPECTION**

INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

Oswestry School

Full Name of School	Oswestry School		
DfE Number	893/6011		
Registered Charity Number	1079822		
Address	Oswestry School Upper Brook Street Oswestry Shropshire S11 2TL		
Telephone Number	01691 655711		
Fax Number	01691 662726		
Email Address	enquiries@oswestryschool.org.uk		
Headmaster	Mr Douglas Robb		
Chairman of Governors	Mr Peter Wilcox-Jones		
Age Range	3 to 19		
Total Number of Pupils	412		
Gender of Pupils	Mixed (242 boys; 170 girls;)		
Numbers by Age	0-2 (EYFS):	0	5-11: 118
	3-5 (EYFS):	4	11-18: 290
Number of Day Pupils	Total:	301	Capacity for flexi-boarding: 6
Number of Boarders	Total:	111	
	Full:	99	Weekly: 12
Head of EYFS Setting	Mrs Jackie Greatorex		
EYFS Gender	Mixed		
Inspection dates	11 May 2011 to 12 May 2011		

PREFACE

This report is according to the *Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) schedule for INTERIM inspections*. The inspection is a two-day visit with a focus on compliance with regulatory requirements. ISI inspections occur every three years and have two formats, interim and standard, which usually occur in an alternating pattern. The school's next inspection will therefore follow the standard schedule, which includes two visits totalling five days and places greater emphasis on the quality of education and care in addition to reporting on regulatory compliance. The school's previous inspection was in May 2007.

The Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) is the body approved by the Government for the purpose of inspecting schools belonging to Independent Schools Council (ISC) Associations and reporting on compliance with the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010*. The range of these Regulations is as follows.

- (a) Quality of education provided (curriculum)
- (b) Quality of education provided (teaching)
- (c) Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils
- (d) Welfare, health and safety of pupils
- (e) Suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors
- (f) Premises and accommodation
- (g) Provision of information
- (h) Manner in which complaints are to be handled

*These Regulations replace those first introduced on 1 September 2003.

Legislation additional to Part 3, Welfare, health and safety of pupils, is as follows.

- (i) The Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (SENDA).
- (ii) Race, gender and sexual discrimination legislation.
- (iii) Corporal punishment.

The inspection was also carried out under the arrangements of the ISC Associations for the maintenance and improvement of the quality of their membership.

ISI is also approved to inspect the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), which was introduced in September 2008 and applies to all children in England from birth to 31st August following their fifth birthday. This report evaluates the extent to which the setting fulfils the requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage Statutory Framework published by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) and follows the requirements of the Childcare Act 2006 as subsequently amended.

A specific inspection of boarding was not carried out and the report does not contain judgements on the National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools. Any comments on boarding arising from this inspection are in the context of the school as a whole. The existing report on boarding was produced in December, 2008 by the Children's Directorate of the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) and can be found at www.ofsted.gov.uk under Children's social care/Boarding school.

The inspection of the school is from an educational perspective and provides limited inspection of other aspects, though inspectors will comment on any significant hazards or problems they encounter which have an adverse impact on children. The inspection does not include:

- (i) an exhaustive health and safety audit

- (ii) an in-depth examination of the structural condition of the school, its services or other physical features
- (iii) an investigation of the financial viability of the school or its accounting procedures
- (iv) an in-depth investigation of the school's compliance with employment law.

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1. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

- 1.1 Pupils have been educated at Oswestry School for more than 600 years. It has been co-educational for more than thirty years and is situated just outside the town on two sites. The senior school caters for pupils aged nine to eighteen. Bellan House is a five-minute walk away and is the preparatory school for pupils aged three to eight. The first class, Reception, provides the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) curriculum. A separate, private Nursery is also on the Bellan House site. Senior and preparatory schools share a single governing body.
- 1.2 Following its motto 'We learn not for school, but for life', the school aims to provide a first class education for boys and girls within a structured environment that develops pupils' capabilities, competences and skills. Their academic, moral and physical development is to be promoted through the curriculum, pastoral care, sport and other activities. The intention is to provide an environment where each pupil fulfils his or her potential, building self-confidence and a desire to contribute to the wider community.
- 1.3 Pupils from all types of background are welcomed and are offered places based on their perceived potential to contribute positively to the school community and take advantage of the education offered. Reports from pupils' previous schools are considered, where possible, and a meeting between the parents and senior staff takes place before entry is accepted. Overseas pupils take English and mathematics assessments. Pupils can sit a scholarship examination at various ages between six and sixteen.
- 1.4 The ability profile of pupils entering the preparatory school and the senior school is broadly in line with the national average. It is above average for those entering the sixth form. Out of a total of 412 pupils aged three to eighteen, 242 are boys, 170 girls, and 111 are boarders. All but twelve boarders are full-time. The sixth form comprises 60 in Year 12 and 33 in Year 13. The school provides specific support for 75 pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL) and come mainly from China, Ukraine, Spain and Germany. It has also identified 55 pupils as having special educational needs; three-quarters of these receive additional support. Their needs are predominantly dyslexia.
- 1.5 Since its last inspection, the school has expanded its residential premises, to accommodate an increasing number of boarders, by building a new boarding house and refurbishing older ones. A new headmaster has been in post for almost a year.
- 1.6 National Curriculum nomenclature is used throughout this report to refer to year groups in the school.

2. THE SUCCESS OF THE SCHOOL

The quality of the pupils' achievements and their learning, attitudes and basic skills

- 2.1 Pupils' overall achievement is good, indicating that the school fulfils its aim to assist pupils in reaching their potential. Their literacy skills are strong, particularly oracy, they are numerate and have satisfactory skills in the use of information and communication technology (ICT). Their creative and physical skills are well developed and they solve problems effectively. Pupils have good levels of knowledge and understanding in the subjects they learn.
- 2.2 Pupils are successful individually and as members of teams in the wide range of activities available. In the preparatory school, these include Kung Fu, street-dancing and gardening. Senior school pupils are involved in many outdoor pursuits and music groups, including a Samba band, and take up leadership opportunities in sports and the combined cadet force. Younger pupils entered and won the 'Oswestry in Bloom' schools' competition this year and have been very successful both in ballet and drama examinations, and in public speaking competitions. Older pupils have enjoyed success in sporting activities, including county honours at both netball and football, and high attainment in kayaking and white-water canoeing. Participation in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme resulted in 28 sixth-form pupils gaining gold awards last year.
- 2.3 Pupils' attainment at age eleven cannot be measured in relation to average performance against a national test, as none is taken, but on the evidence available it is judged to be high in relation to national age-related expectations. The following analyses use the national GCSE and A-level data for 2008 to 2010. Results in GCSE have been above the national average for maintained schools. A-level results were similar to the national average of maintained schools in 2008; in 2009 and 2010 they were above this average and similar to the national average for selective schools. In 2010, two-fifths of the GCSE results and nearly half of the A-level results were graded A* or A. Results in IGCSE EAL examinations in 2010 were higher than the worldwide average, and similar to the UK average where the benchmark is higher. Most pupils gain places at their selected higher education institution. These levels of attainment indicate that pupils make good progress relative to the average for pupils of similar ability.
- 2.4 The quality of teaching contributes well to the progress pupils make. Some excellent lessons were observed that were thoroughly planned and delivered at an enthusiastic and lively pace. Close, helpful relationships between staff and pupils were evident, such as in a Year 3 French lesson where pupils were given the opportunity to show their linguistic skills to the full. On the senior school site, specialist teaching in all subjects contributes positively to the progress of Year 5 and 6 pupils. In a few lessons, teaching offered limited challenge, particularly for the most capable, or opportunities for pupils to use their individual initiative. Such teaching was overly directed, lacked creativity and did not engage all the pupils effectively. The quality of assessment is satisfactory and a focus for improvement in the school, where new systems have yet to be fully implemented. In the preparatory school marking is thorough and encouraging, with detailed comments. Marking of books in the senior school shows few diagnostic or helpful, constructive comments.

- 2.5 The curriculum, in most respects, is broadly balanced, which is in line with the school's aims, supports learning and makes a satisfactory contribution to pupils' progress. The current arrangements for GCSE and A-level options, however, are not wholly successful in offering pupils a balanced provision, especially in science. ICT is not used effectively to support learning in all subjects. Curriculum links between the preparatory and senior schools are underdeveloped with insufficient coherent planning for continuity of learning. Preparatory school pupils benefit from some specialist teaching and the 'forest school', which enhances their knowledge and investigative skills in mathematics and science. Pupils with special educational needs and those with English as an additional language have appropriate programmes of study and gain from professional guidance. Provision for careers in Years 9 to 13 has improved since the previous inspection and older pupils appreciate the new careers library and more detailed advice. Personal, social and health education has a sound scheme of work, with developments under way to make this more cohesive, including a greater emphasis on citizenship. Extension activities are provided for pupils in Years 11 and 12, with plans to include other year groups, enhancing provision for the able, gifted and talented.
- 2.6 Pupils of all ages have an excellent attitude to their work; they enjoy learning. Responsive and co-operative, they work extremely well together or on their own. Pupils think for themselves and show initiative. They are thoughtful and considerate towards each other and have a highly positive approach.

The quality of the pupils' personal development

- 2.7 Pupils' personal development is excellent overall, reflecting the school's aim to develop individuals' spiritual, moral, social and cultural qualities. Pupils' spiritual awareness is good. They learn to reflect on spiritual values through several lessons and show great integrity in discussions, aware of the motives and feelings of others. In preparatory school assemblies, pupils consider interpretations of stories, and senior school pupils have a good awareness of the tenets of major world religions. Pupils' moral development is excellent. Throughout the school, they have a strong moral sense of what is right and wrong. Pupils of all ages appreciate that they are relatively fortunate and have raised substantial sums of money to support key charities, for example the air ambulance service, through a school-wide sponsored swim.
- 2.8 Social development is also excellent. Pupils welcome visitors in a friendly relaxed manner and speak both to adults and their peers in the same confident yet courteous way. Bullying is extremely rare because pupils are aware of the implications of their actions. At all ages they enjoy taking responsibility, which they are encouraged to do. Preparatory school prefects greatly enjoy helping younger pupils, and in the senior school pupils take on posts of responsibility such as heads of house, school council representatives and team captains, very keen to represent their school. The pupils' cultural awareness is good. The presence of pupils from overseas enriches the school community and pupils learn much from each other of their customs and traditions, valuing similarities and differences. Pupils in the preparatory school talk knowledgeably about the prominent display of art panels showing the diversity of cultures within the school. Pupils' awareness of their own heritage and that of others is also enhanced by learning foreign languages from Reception onwards and from visits both within this country and abroad.

- 2.9 The boarding experience is good, offering an enjoyable environment with pupil-initiated activities at weekends and in the evenings as well as those organised by the school. The good individual care supports their emotional and learning needs.
- 2.10 The school's high quality of pastoral care supports pupils' personal development. Staff know their pupils very well and the pupils are confident that they will be listened to and will receive any help or guidance they require. The family atmosphere engenders excellent relationships between staff and pupils and among the pupils themselves. Satisfactory policies are in place to safeguard pupils' welfare, health and safety. The school has fitting risk assessments for fire, educational visits and supervision of pupils. First-aid procedures are appropriate and medical facilities are available on both school sites. Attendance registers and the admission register are completed as required. Food provided is of good quality, nutritious and plentiful and pupils understand the need for regular exercise.

The effectiveness of governance, leadership and management

- 2.11 Good governance is effective in promoting the aim of the school, 'to learn not for school but for life'. Governors are committed to the rapid rate of change initiated by the new headmaster, who is promoting an improved quality of education and the attainment of higher academic standards. Both of these involve new structures and approaches. The governors' committees work well, enabling efficient use to be made of the wide-ranging expertise on the board. Regular meetings between the chairman and the headmaster have established excellent lines of communication; relationships are strong. Records of governors' meetings indicate clearly that the headmaster makes himself accountable to governors and they question him rigorously. Governors are fully aware of their safeguarding and other requirements. Financial management is astute and successful enabling the school to improve its facilities and staffing.
- 2.12 The quality of leadership and management is satisfactory overall. Excellent vision, commitment and drive from the new headmaster is resulting in far-reaching and highly successful change. The response to the recommendations of the last report was slow. A new senior team for the senior school has been appointed for the start of the next academic year. The changing structure of the school is increasing efficiency and effectiveness, as pupils in Year 5 and 6 will be retained on the spacious preparatory site rather than moving on to the senior site. Monitoring and evaluation have not been sufficiently robust to ensure consistent good practice in teaching and assessment, the curriculum provision or in the manner in which subjects are led and managed. The new arrangements for the coming academic year are specific and are clearly planned to resolve these issues. The current appraisal systems used on the preparatory and senior school sites are under review in order to formulate a uniform approach across the school. No whole-school development plan is in place, as was recommended in the previous report, although the aspirational strategic plan for the next four years is helpful, providing a clear direction. This does not, however, include details such as responsibilities, timings and success criteria to enable the headmaster and governors to monitor the progress being made in key areas of school life.
- 2.13 Recruitment procedures and the single central register of appointments are now robust, although historical administrative issues have only recently been resolved following centralisation of systems. In the period to 2010, the requirements for medical certification prior to appointment were not met but have now been completed retrospectively.

- 2.14 The school premises and accommodation are good. The preparatory school is bright, spacious and well decorated. New and improved play areas include an all-weather surface. The senior school facilities include a swimming pool and separate music school. Buildings on both sites are undergoing substantial rearrangements and improvement, including the establishment of suites of rooms for subjects on the senior school site.
- 2.15 The quality of links with parents, carers and guardians is good. Communication is frequent both by post and email. Reports, which are sent out three times a year, are both judgemental and constructively critical. The programme of governor and senior leadership team lunches for parents enables issues to be dealt with quickly and effectively. Parents in their questionnaire responses indicated how exceptionally pleased they are with their children's attitudes and values and generally how happy they are with the school. A small number indicated that the highest attainers could be challenged further. Inspectors agree with these positive views, and that the expectations of the most capable are not always high enough. The procedure for handling parental complaints is appropriate. Links to the community are excellent and diverse, exemplified by a talking newspaper for the blind, the use of the boarding houses as holiday homes for pupils in need, and the music and poetry recital series, where world class musicians and internationally renowned poets perform readings.

3. ACTION POINTS

(i) Compliance with regulatory requirements

(The range of the Independent School Standards Regulations is given in the Preface)

- 3.1 The school meets all the requirements of the Independent School Standards Regulations 2010.

(ii) Recommendations for further improvement

- 3.2 The school is advised to make the following improvements.
1. Improve the quality of the curriculum by providing better balance and continuity in learning.
 2. Improve the quality of teaching and assessment, to ensure that practice is consistently effective throughout the school.
 3. Ensure that senior leaders, heads of department and subject leaders are more effective in evaluating and supporting the quality of education provided.
 4. Prepare a whole-school development plan with clear short- and medium-term goals which can be used to promote and measure progress in identified priorities.

4. THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE EARLY YEARS FOUNDATION STAGE

4.(a) The overall effectiveness of the early years provision – how well the school meets the needs of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage

4.1 The overall effectiveness of the EYFS is outstanding. All of the children's needs are met extremely well. Planning is thorough, but allows for a level of flexibility to accommodate children's individual needs. A wide range of suitable systems are in place, which clearly demonstrate the staff's firm commitment to sustain and improve standards. These include monitoring and evaluating the overall provision through regular and systematic checks on teaching, learning and progress. Recent developments include improvements to the Reception class outdoor area, which has had a positive impact on improving curriculum continuity as the children move between indoor and outdoor areas. The setting has plans for future improvement, such as enhancing the links made with the on-site private Nursery, including joint training sessions.

4.(b) The effectiveness of the leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage

4.2 Leadership and management are outstanding. Well-structured policies and procedures are implemented consistently. Safeguarding procedures promote children's welfare extremely well and other policies and practices promote equality of opportunity and eliminate discrimination. Staff have established very positive relationships with parents and carers who are encouraged to be involved in their child's education and are kept extremely well informed of progress. Staff have a dynamic vision for the EYFS and are very aware of the importance of continuous professional development. They are deployed most efficiently and work very well together. The setting's leadership monitors provision very effectively, recording how well individual children are progressing in their learning. A wide range of excellent quality resources, both indoors and outdoors, are accessible to the children and are used very well, supporting them in decision making and working independently.

4.(c) The quality of the provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage

4.3 The overall quality of provision is outstanding. Learning for each child is enjoyable and challenging. Staff adopt a supportive and encouraging approach, and have established high-quality relationships with children whom they know very well. Within a family atmosphere, children are encouraged to strive to meet high expectations. The indoor and outdoor environments are used effectively to promote many aspects of children's learning and to foster positive attitudes and approaches. Detailed planning is sufficiently flexible to take account of children's differing needs. Speaking and listening skills, along with the use of mathematical language, are nurtured very effectively. Through the well-planned curriculum children are helped to develop an understanding of the world around them and also of technology. Children gain in confidence through encouragement and reward of their creative achievements and their social and emotional development is promoted very effectively. The staff ensure that children are safe and healthy and maintain their personal hygiene, introducing them to a range of sensible routines that they understand.

4.(d) Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage

- 4.4 Given their varied starting points, by the end of the EYFS the children's outcomes are outstanding. Children of all abilities make excellent progress striving to meet staff's expectations. By the end of their Reception year they can write simple sentences, use numbers to ten effectively, and understand the benefits of using ICT. Children are skilful at manipulating small and large tools, are learning to enjoy music and show awareness of the benefits of physical activity. They are outstanding learners and greatly enjoy their time in school. During the 'forest school' activities, for example, children formed triangles from twigs, describing their actions and outcomes most effectively and extending their language to compare and contrast differences. They are developing an awareness of how to stay safe and willingly confide in adults. Children recognise the value of healthy eating, are confident in making choices, and work very well independently. They share and co-operate, and show a high level of respect for others.

Section 3 includes what the Early Years Foundation Stage should do to improve its provision.

INSPECTION EVIDENCE

The inspectors observed a sample of lessons, conducted formal interviews with pupils and examined samples of pupils' work. They held discussions with senior members of staff and with the chairman of governors, and attended registration sessions and assemblies. Inspectors visited the facilities for sick or injured pupils. The responses of parents and pupils to pre-inspection questionnaires were analysed, and the inspectors examined regulatory documentation made available by the school.

Inspectors

Mr Peter McGregor

Miss Mary Burridge

Mr Michael Abraham

Miss Victoria Barrett

Miss Valerie Craven

Reporting Inspector

Assistant Reporting Inspector

Former head, HMC School

Deputy head, HMC School

Early Years Co-ordinating Inspector