

The Montessori Place

Independent school standard inspection report

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Reporting inspector	John Seal 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 2002, as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.^{1, 2}

The inspection of registered provision was conducted under Sections 49 and 50 of the Childcare Act 2006.^{3, 4}

Information about the school

The Montessori Place is an independent preparatory school for girls and boys aged from 16 months to eight years. Situated in the town of Hove, on the south coast, the school occupies a renovated Victorian town house which was formerly a language school. The school is registered for 45 children. Currently there are 37 on roll, including five children under three. A total of 27 children are in the Early Years Foundation Stage, of whom 16 are funded under the government's nursery scheme, and 17 attend part time. The school is currently organised into three classes: the infant community (16 months to 3 years), children's house (3 to 5 years) and the elementary class (6 to 8 years). None of the children has a statement of special educational needs and no children are looked after. The majority of children are White British with a small proportion from a diverse range of minority ethnic backgrounds. Two children speak English as an additional language. The school states that it aims 'to aid each child's natural development from birth'. This is the school's first full Ofsted inspection since it was registered and opened in September 2011. The registered, Early Years Foundation Stage, 0 to 3 years provision was last inspected in December 2011.

Evaluation of the school

The Montessori Place provides an outstanding quality of education and meets its aims exceedingly well. The effectiveness of the registered Early Years Foundation Stage provision is outstanding. Children make outstanding progress because of the outstanding teaching and assessment supported by an outstanding curriculum. Provision for children's welfare, health and safety, including safeguarding arrangements, are outstanding. Strengths throughout the school include outstanding spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and excellent behaviour. All education and childcare regulatory requirements are met.

¹ www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2002/32/contents.

² www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2005/18/contents.

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.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2006/21/contents.

Quality of education

The curriculum is outstanding. Short- and long-term plans are very well established and are based on the Montessori approach. They are exceedingly well tailored to meet every child's need. The school's diligent implementation of the Montessori curriculum matches and enhances the areas of learning in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Separate subjects are often taught in themes in the elementary class, for example 'The Coming of the Universe' and 'The Story of Number'. Basic skills of literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) are well integrated into most subjects as well as being covered discretely. The development of children's personal, social and health education (PSHE) is exceptionally woven into most aspects of the curriculum and the school day. The key strength of the curriculum is how it is used to develop exceptionally high levels of independence for each child. Consequently, all of the children, from the very youngest onwards, are able to freely and confidently access the materials and resources that they need to aide their learning. High quality resources are very well organised with thought and care around the different rooms. Physical education (PE) and physical activities are very well catered for and make a very positive contribution to further developing children's physical development. Children take part in weekly sessions of sporting activity including ball skills and climbing. Daily sessions are organised in the garden and walks to a local park and the beaches to take part in gardening and orienteering. The creative and naturalistic outdoor learning area is developing very well and the youngest children have some opportunities to access this. However, it is not always used to its full potential. The proprietors are aware of this issue and the current development plans are already underway to further improve the outdoor areas and their accessibility. To enhance the curriculum, regular visits take place to enrich learning and broaden children's horizons. These include going to the local library, museums and local beaches. Artefacts from a local museum are frequently brought in to add variety and richness to children's learning. In the elementary class, children were absorbed in sketching preserved owls which resulted in some excellent drawing outcomes. A very small proportion of the parental questionnaires, and those parents and carers who spoke to an inspector, felt that more educational visits could be organised to add to the curriculum experiences of the children. The proprietors are aware of this and there are well-advanced plans for more visits during the summer term.

Teaching and assessment are outstanding. From the very youngest children to the oldest, the attention to detail in providing resources and activities is exemplary. One of the parents who returned a questionnaire wrote: 'The teachers are well trained and genuinely love what they do. The children love them. They know the children well and do everything possible to bring joy to learning.' This is true. Throughout the school day, teachers provide a wealth of opportunities for children to explore different materials and experiences in a calm and productive atmosphere. Children's behaviour is outstanding because they respond well to teachers' unobtrusive strategies which regain children's interest and engagement without affecting the calm, productive learning atmosphere. The older children are able to develop their investigative skills in depth, demonstrating high levels of concentration in their work

and are totally absorbed in the detail of their learning. For example, one child was painstakingly sowing seeds in soil with tweezers and looking closely at them with a magnifying glass. Her companion was producing accurate detailed sketches of them. Teachers know all the children very well. Gentle but persuasive techniques are skilfully employed to encourage children to engage and explore their learning environment. Teachers are also very effective in ensuring planning is adapted to meet the needs of children very accurately. Children respond to these strategies extremely well and as a result learn enthusiastically often becoming deeply engrossed in their work. Consequently, children make outstanding progress and their standards in the basic skills of reading, writing and mathematics are in many cases above those usually seen for their age.

Teachers regularly record observations about the progress children make and the level of effort that has gone into the work. This information is used well to provide children with the next set of activities. Staff plan for each child's learning at a precise individual level very well, accurately matching activities to children's specific needs and capabilities. The recording of children's responses and potential next steps are detailed, and staff carefully track children's progress over time. Teachers effectively map out how children interact with different sensorial materials, events, activities and each other. This information is shared productively with parents and carers on a frequent basis.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

Children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding in all age groups. In the short time the school has been in existence, it has developed a warm, welcoming and friendly family atmosphere. Children's attendance is high and their behaviour is outstanding. Children say they are safe, happy and enjoy their learning. There have been no reported incidents of bullying. Children's very positive attitudes are demonstrated to an exemplary effect in their high levels of independence both for learning and taking on responsibilities around the classrooms and school. The younger children in the Early Years Foundation Stage settle in extremely quickly and rapidly become keen and confident members of their learning community. This can be seen in every class. Children develop a good awareness of different religions and cultures because of the effectively promoted series of planned events to mark religious festivals throughout the year. For example, a member of staff talked about their personal experiences of Diwali and a parent shared her experiences of Chinese New Year. In addition to the high standards of basic skills, children of all ages work very well collaboratively. Children take on additional responsibilities with confidence, including maintaining the neat and well-organised resources, looking after pets and preparing and clearing up after lunch. Children have a good understanding of public institutions which is fostered through visits to local museums and libraries. In one lesson observed, a girl was able to talk knowledgeably about members of the royal family. Children are keen to learn and to take part in the range of activities the school provides. They contribute to the school community very well as it is an integral part of the Montessori approach. For example, children help prepare their learning activities and tidy-up carefully, demonstrating a genuine respect for different

artefacts and resources. Lunchtimes are an enjoyable, communal event where children help to set out the tables and clear up afterwards. Older children help younger ones at certain times most days. Although the school is still in its early stages of development, its contribution to the wider community includes children being involved in litter picking on the beach, and plans are in place for them to work with older people in the community on knitting projects.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

Provision for children's welfare, health and safety is outstanding. This includes provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage where children's welfare, health and safety are given a high priority. Staff are very highly qualified in terms of first aid training. As a result children feel very safe and they are extremely well cared for. Procedures and policies for safeguarding, including the child protection training of staff, are extremely robust and are rigorously applied. There are exemplary policies for behaviour, anti-bullying, fire and first aid. Procedures are very well understood by staff and are implemented effectively. Children are carefully and sensitively supervised. Health and safety procedures and risk assessments are very secure. The small number of children who returned the questionnaires are very positive about all aspects of school life. Those who spoke to inspectors demonstrated a good awareness of how to live healthy lifestyles and stay safe. The school's promotion of healthy eating is particularly noteworthy. Children thoroughly enjoy the excellent food which is locally sourced, organic and prepared on the premises by the highly qualified and experienced chef. The school's three-year access plan meets the regulatory requirements of the Equality Act 2010.

Suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors

Thorough procedures for the vetting and appointment of staff and others are in place and arrangements meet all requirements. The school has a single central register of staff checks which contains all of the required information.

Premises and accommodation at the school

The school's accommodation provides a bright, warm and friendly space for the children to be taught happily and safely, and all regulations are met. The school building is maintained and decorated to a very high standard. All of the furniture and fittings have been assiduously sourced to create an informal, homely atmosphere. There is a dedicated, well-used space for a family room where parents and carers meet each other and staff informally. There are suitable facilities for children who are ill. Outside there is a garden which although still under development provides different spaces for children to explore, play and learn.

Provision of information

All of the required information is provided, or is made available, to parents, carers and others. There are termly newsletters and an informative and helpful website. All

of the parental questionnaires returned, and those parents and carers who spoke to the inspector, were extremely positive, indicating that parents and carers hold the school in very high regard. A real strength of the school is how quickly the partnership with parents and carers has become established. For example, in addition to the regular informal contacts with individual children's parents and carers, the school holds well-attended workshops covering different aspects of children's development, including relationships with children and their learning. Parents and carers who spoke to the inspector were very pleased with these sessions finding them extremely beneficial to their children's learning and general well-being. In one of the questionnaires, a parent wrote that her child had 'excelled this year and is excited to go to school every day'.

Manner in which complaints are to be handled

The complaints procedure meets regulatory requirements.

Registered provision for children aged from birth to three years

The school's provision is outstanding and so are the outcomes. Children receive an exceptionally warm and individual welcome to the start of their school life. Their learning development and welfare needs are met with extreme care, detail and thoughtfulness. Children are confident, independent, articulate and happy and their behaviour is outstanding.

Well-qualified and experienced adults ensure that every child is actively involved in worthwhile learning. Children are extremely well cared for. This is evident in the warm and thoughtful responses to children's needs by all staff. Adults' very accurate, detailed and effective observations, assessments and planning provide children with a wide range of individual learning experiences. As a result, activities match all children's needs extremely well, promoting curiosity and interest. Overall, children's progress is outstanding. Their skills, abilities and levels of independence are far higher than usually seen. Relationships are excellent. The youngest children communicate their needs very well and are exceptionally confident in their personal care. The outdoor learning area has improved since the previous inspection of childcare. Although children have safe and easy access to the secure, interesting and pleasant garden, they are not always encouraged to use it as much as they could be.

Leadership and management are outstanding. The proprietors have an excellent and accurate view of the school's areas of strength and where it needs to improve. They effectively oversee the closely knit team of staff who work and cooperate very effectively. Individual children's records are maintained in detail. Relationships with parents and carers are exemplary. The workshops, home visits and general day-to-day contact are managed in an exemplary fashion and used to ensure important information is exchanged with parents, carers and others.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The proprietor has ensured that the school meets The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010, schedule 1 ('the Regulations'). 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.

- Increase children's learning opportunities and experiences to extend their learning into the outdoor area, particularly those in the Early Years Foundation Stage.

Inspection judgements

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 registered provision for children aged from birth to three years

Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	✓			
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	✓			
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	✓			
Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	✓			

School details

School status	Independent		
Type of school	Montessori		
Date school opened	September 2011		
Age range of pupils	16 months to 8 years		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 6	Girls: 9	Total: 15
Number on roll (part-time pupils)	Boys: 5	Girls: 12	Total: 17
Number of children aged 0–3 in registered childcare provision	Boys: 2	Girls: 3	Total: 5
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational needs	Boys: 0	Girls: 0	Total: 0
Number of pupils who are looked after	Boys: 0	Girls: 0	Total: 0
Annual fees (day pupils)	£9,000		
Annual fees (childcare)	£4,500		
Address of school	45 Cromwell Road Hove BN3 3ER		
Telephone number	01273 773 764		
Email address	rob@themontessoriplace.org.uk		
Headteacher	Robert Gueterbock		
Proprietors	Robert Gueterbock Karen Pearce Paul Pillai		

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



4 May 2012

Dear Children

Inspection of The Montessori Place, Hove BN3 3ER

Thank you for making inspectors feel so welcome when we recently visited your school. We really enjoyed observing you while you were learning and also enjoyed talking to you about your school. We judged The Montessori Place to be an outstanding school that meets all government requirements. This is because it gives you a place where you:

- enjoy your school very much
- learn a lot quickly because you have outstanding teachers
- behave excellently
- have very good attendance
- feel very safe and looked after
- can learn and play outside well enough, but could do this even more.

We talked to your headteacher and the staff about the outside area. They have already got plans to make this even better to help you learn more outdoors.

I hope that you all continue to enjoy your learning at The Montessori Place in the future.

Yours sincerely

John Seal
Her Majesty's Inspector