

The Montessori Place

45 Cromwell Road, Hove, East Sussex BN3 3ER

Inspection dates

19–21 September 2017

Overall effectiveness	Outstanding
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Outstanding
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Outstanding
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Outstanding
Outcomes for pupils	Outstanding
Early years provision	Outstanding
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Outstanding

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school

- The culture, ethos and approach of this school are deeply embedded throughout the mixed-age learning 'communities'. The exquisite environments across both sites have been expertly designed to support pupils' learning and development.
- All teachers, known as 'guides', use their incredibly detailed knowledge of each pupil exceptionally well to ensure that they thrive.
- Pupils' own interests and choices are paramount. Using these as a catalyst, adults' meticulous and carefully considered planning underpin pupils' excellent progress.
- The guides use their expert subject knowledge to great effect, skilfully judging the most effective ways to help pupils take the next steps in their learning. They also steer their very effective 'assistant guides' so that the agreed approach never wavers.
- In this safe and incredibly nurturing environment, children and pupils of all ages are routinely deeply engrossed in their learning. Pupils are highly self-disciplined. Their behaviour is impeccable.
- The exceptional diversity within the curriculum means that pupils develop an extensive range of knowledge, understanding and skills, often beyond typical age-related expectations.
- Early years children take significant strides in their development in the remarkable 'Children's House'.
- The first secondary-aged pupils, now moving through the 'Young People's Community', do as well as younger pupils. The early stages of careers guidance for them are getting off to a promising start, but leaders recognise there is more to do as the school's age range widens.
- There is no hint of complacency among the school's directors. They have introduced simple but effective systems to maintain the very high standards and continue to meet the independent school standards as the school expands. There are important, well-conceived plans in place to continue this process.
- Parents unanimously agreed that they would recommend the school. A very small number are more anxious about the less familiar 'pioneering' Young People's Community.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

- The school meets the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Implement plans to strengthen leadership and management as the school expands, including working with parents to secure the same depth of understanding about what the school offers older pupils as they have about younger pupils.
- Develop the planned strategy for careers guidance further, so that pupils are fully and impartially informed about all options available to them post-16, and thoroughly prepared for this next step.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Outstanding

- The headteacher and senior leaders, who are all also full-time guides, lead by inspiring example. They speak knowledgeably and passionately about the well-established ethos and approach that permeate the school.
- Leaders are resolute in their compelling and uncompromising commitment towards achieving their vision. However, they are also sufficiently pragmatic in their approach, where necessary. Leaders have understood and adapted to the need to be more systematic as the school expands. As one director put it, a 'move away from individuals taking the weight, to systems taking the weight'.
- Various simple but very effective systems have contributed to the considerable consistency of approach that exists for pupils between sites and communities. This includes mentoring processes to manage the performance of the other guides. Despite the obvious expertise of the mentoring guides, leaders have created very well thought through tools to support this work. Documentation provides consistent messages about the school's vision and ethos, and conveys leaders' relentlessly high expectations. Leaders are clearly willing to support staff but also are unafraid to challenge them in order to realise their vision.
- Current plans for improvement reflect the clear ambition, vision and drive of leaders, underpinned by a realistic understanding of what will be required to succeed. Considered plans contain rational steps to sustain and build upon the school's effectiveness as it expands. For example, leaders intend to strengthen the management capacity within the school, enabling them to continue their focus on the education, culture and ethos.
- The passion, commitment and pride of staff at all levels in what the school achieves are crystal clear. Morale is high. Parents commented how dedicated staff are, and how freely they give of their time to engage in detailed conversations about their children.
- Individuality and choice for pupils are key to the school's approach to education. This freedom on the surface is underpinned by a highly structured but adaptive and meaningful curriculum. Leaders have established and updated comprehensive systems to assess, monitor and track pupils' progress and ensure the breadth of their development.
- Pupils' learning is broad and diverse, from Greek gods to Abraham Lincoln, coastal geology to music production, the periodic table and atomic structure to considering the realities of life in Saxon times. Leaders have also just begun to introduce French to the curriculum. During the inspection, children in the Children's House joined in learning a French song, while two pupils in the Elementary Community rehearsed phrases together, helpfully correcting each other's pronunciation.
- In addition to academic progress, pupils develop a wealth of other skills, qualities and attributes. Pupils thrive in the incredibly nurturing environment which fosters their excellent spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and well-being. They are well prepared for life in modern Britain.
- The school's oldest pupils are currently aged 13. Appropriately, in time, leaders intend to offer GCSEs in English, mathematics and science. Leaders have sought external advice to

make sure that pupils' current standards mean they are on track to excel at the next level.

- Pupils' experiences are enriched through a range of specialist visitors. 'Young People's Community (YPC)' pupils were starting to learn about bee-keeping during the inspection. They were looking forward to a forthcoming six-week course about cosmology to be presented by a visitor from a local observatory. Educational visits for Elementary pupils are similarly wide-ranging, from the House of Lords to running an 'equalities' stall at a local event, all initiated by pupils.
- Pupils at the Eason's Green site benefit from the extensive grounds, including the ancient woodlands and extensive allotments, and the unique opportunities that these present. For example, they learn about horticulture and the associated economics. Pupils at the less-isolated Hove site, however, make frequent use of their local area and facilities, with the benefits that these bring. On both sites, the same sense of ownership and responsibility is engendered through pupils' care for the school's environment and pets. Parents reported that they can select their preferred site, according to their child and family needs.
- Every pupil in the school has a detailed and regularly reviewed individual education plan, including pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Appropriately, leaders have sought and acted on specialist advice about pupils with specific needs, for example in supporting pupils who have dyslexia, within a Montessori approach. They have also drawn on links with a speech and language therapist, when required. However, realising the potential benefits, leaders are wisely planning to extend their network of professionals on whom to draw, regarding special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- Most parents are overwhelmingly supportive of the school. Words parents used to convey their opinions about the school, the environment, the staff and how well their children are doing included: 'astounded'; 'marvel'; 'extraordinary'; 'amazing', 'truly inspirational'; 'completely dedicated'; and 'harmonious'. One parent seemed to sum up the sentiment of many by simply saying: 'We couldn't ask for any more.'
- A small number of parents responding to Parent View disagreed that leaders respond well to their concerns. Others particularly praised this aspect of the school. There is a suitable complaints policy in place, with no formal complaints registered in the previous academic year. Some parents, particularly those of pupils reaching the end of their time in the Elementary Community, are more anxious about the unfamiliar territory of what the YPC can offer. Leaders recognise this and have plans in place to address, more specifically, the concerns of parents of pupils at this stage.

Governance

- There are no recognisable formal governance arrangements. The headteacher and senior leaders are also the school's proprietors and directors. However, there is no doubt that they set and maintain their own relentlessly high expectations and standards.
- There is also no sense of complacency. Through effective and routine monitoring, directors ensure that all of the independent school standards are met. Directors regularly invite external scrutiny in their continuous drive for improvement. They are candid and frank about anything that could be further refined. Directors are receptive, reflective and measured about ways to improve, ensuring that anything new is entirely consistent with the school's strong ethos and approach.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- There is a keen sense among leaders and staff at different levels of both their collective and individual responsibility to safeguard pupils. The importance of this work has a high profile in school and among staff. Staff have a wide range of suitable training and are clear about what to do to protect pupils and keep them safe. Where necessary, they are prompt to consult with other professionals.
- The close but subtle and unobtrusive scrutiny that each pupil is under, as a critical foundation for supporting their learning, contributes significantly to the work to maintain their positive mental health and well-being. The very close partnerships with parents mean that relevant information is readily shared.
- Rigorous checks determine the suitability of adults to work with children and young people. The single central register is very well ordered and goes beyond statutory requirements to also record other checks and training.
- The wide-ranging policy for safeguarding, published on the school's website, aligns well with a range of relevant guidance. Close links with a number of other related policies support the school's clear culture and ethos. For example, the 'assessing and enabling risk' policy places emphasis not only on adults reducing or eliminating risks appropriately, but also supporting pupils to identify and understand how to respond to risk.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Outstanding

- The guides are experts in their fields. They take the utmost account of pupils' individual interests and needs, including targeting specific areas of learning that pupils need to 'unlock' in order to progress. In addition, leaders readily look beyond the school for a greater range of subject-specific expertise, leading, for example, to some exceptionally high-quality artwork.
- Each community's learning environment is especially carefully and thoughtfully designed. With considerable attention to detail, the intended benefits to pupils' independence and stimulation are readily achieved. Despite the contrasting building style between the two sites, there is a high degree of consistency in the quality and nature of the internal environment. The rich choice and quality of purposeful activity prompt the high levels of independence necessary to make the school's chosen style of teaching and learning highly successful.
- Learning time is typically highly purposeful and productive. The school's chosen flexible and individualised approach is underpinned by careful and detailed planning. Pupils of different abilities have ample opportunity to grasp securely a wide range of knowledge, skills and understanding. There are plentiful and meaningful links between learning in different subject disciplines. Pupils are readily able to apply their learning to different situations because they routinely work and learn in real-life scenarios.
- Guides' in-depth knowledge of each individual enables them to provide the right degree of challenge at the right time, including for the most able. At well-chosen and opportune moments, through short, sharply focused 'presentations', guides explain, demonstrate or model very clearly key learning points for pupils. The approach to supporting pupils who

have special educational needs and/or disabilities blends consistently with the approach for all pupils.

- The well-trained assistant guides contribute well to the consistency of approach. They act well on their initiative and share valuable information from their observations with their guides. With the additional expertise that they bring, lead guides gently direct their assistants, where necessary, and there is a strong sense of teamwork.
- The school's policy is not to set homework. While a small minority of parents disagree with this approach, others particularly singled out this aspect of the school's ethos for praise. Some parents explained how their children are inspired to engage purposefully in learning at home without set tasks. They commended the specific suggestions that guides offer them to support their children's development at home. Many parents are impressed by how deeply guides know and understand their children. They appreciate how freely guides give of their time to discuss their children's learning and progress.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Outstanding

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- Excellent relationships, both among and between pupils and staff, combine with the exceptional physical environment to create an optimum climate where pupils thrive.
- Parents who responded to Parent View were unanimous that their children are happy in school. All agreed that their children are well looked after. 'Helping children to grow as whole people, not just achievers of academic success,' was how one parent put it. This sentiment was typical of many other comments. The pastoral care of pupils was repeatedly praised, using terms such as 'absolutely outstanding'. Inspectors agree with these positive views.
- Pupils master a wide range of learning skills and are impressively self-sufficient in sustaining their focus and engagement. There is a palpable sense of ownership by pupils in their activities, learning and work. They are rightly and hugely proud of their school. Pupils enjoy the personalisation of their learning and value 'being treated as an individual'.
- Through a wide and meaningful range of additional responsibilities, pupils develop and hone a wealth of significant life skills. Children and pupils of all ages take responsibility for selecting, organising and tidying away resources, readily and predominantly unprompted. Pupils have an important voice in their daily lives and education, including feeding directly into their individual education plan. Among their responsibilities, they also care for the school's many pets, organise the dining rooms for lunch and answer the school's telephone.
- Pupils' social skills become increasingly well-honed as they move through the school. They are sensitive and reflective and negotiate with each other to make decisions and resolve any conflict. Pupils demonstrate considerable resilience, including the most able, and are willing to grapple with challenging concepts.
- Inspection evidence indicates that bullying is exceptionally rare. The issue is treated by leaders with the utmost seriousness. Pupils, parents and staff understand that any

bullying would completely undermine the school's ethos and success. There are clear and suitable anti-bullying policies and strategies in place, although the use of these very seldom moves beyond the positive strategies that help to prevent any bullying.

- Pupils feel safe. Parents and pupils were unanimous about this. The approach of 'assessing and enabling risk' deepens pupils' understanding of their own decisions and responsibilities in keeping themselves safe. That said, some pupils' understanding of how to navigate the potential risks and benefits of new technologies is not at quite the same depth as other aspects of personal safety in their daily lives.
- Although pupils find out about a diverse world of work, current plans for careers guidance and advice for older pupils are not as developed as they should be. Experience and expertise in careers guidance exists among staff, but the strategy for how pupils will be fully and impartially informed of their best options post-16 is at an early stage.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding.
- The exceptional climate for learning, combined with pupils' outstanding personal development, welfare and well-being, provide the rock-solid foundations that result in pupils' behaviour almost taking care of itself.
- Children and pupils of all ages, across the sites and communities, are incredibly self-disciplined. Their conduct throughout the day is entirely conducive to the ethos, culture and approach of the school.
- Although the necessary policies and provisions are in place and entirely appropriate, the use of any sort of sanction is extremely rare. Adults always use any rare opportunities as a way to learn something more about the individual involved and plan carefully to avoid any reoccurrence of any incident or problem.
- Pupils attend regularly. In particular, older pupils in the YPC very rarely miss a day of school.

Outcomes for pupils

Outstanding

- Across the school, children and pupils develop an exceptionally wide and varied range of skills, knowledge and understanding.
- Pupils' experiences in the Elementary Community clearly build on the excellent start they make in the Children's House. Pupils work with focus and precision on their chosen tasks.
- Throughout all communities, pupils are routinely, deeply engrossed in a very broad range of stimulating and meaningful activities.
- Learning is very often at a more advanced level than is typical for pupils' ages. The concepts explored linked to mathematics, science, geography and history, for example, are often complex. Pupils are rightly proud of their work and achievements.
- The high value, benefits and joy of reading are realised by pupils, who hold this pastime in high regard. Pupils learn to read fluently, and with expression and understanding. A very wide range of high-quality and challenging texts are readily available to pupils. Older pupils can be routinely seen lost in a book, including during their free time.

- Where there are academic comparisons, most pupils' outcomes are at least in line with similar-aged pupils nationally, with approximately half exceeding this. The most able are well challenged and achieve extremely well. Individual plans for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are closely monitored and reviewed alongside their parents. Those with lower starting points typically catch up over time. Some pupils are significantly behind when they start, and may not be working at an age-related standard yet, but usually the gap is narrowing.
- Pupils who speak English as an additional language thrive similarly well as other pupils. Depending on the extent of their English language on entry, they often make significantly accelerated progress in English in the first months and years. Guides ensure that any initial weakness in English language is not a barrier to learning in other areas, such as mathematics.
- Most parents reported that they are very pleased with their children's progress. A number commented how they really flourish, both personally and academically. Each community prepares children and pupils exceptionally well for the next stages of their education. In recent years, few pupils have moved on to education elsewhere. At this stage, the full success of the YPC in terms of preparing pupils for their post-16 futures is unknown and untested.

Early years provision

Outstanding

- The immaculate environment in the Children's House sets the tone for the very high quality experience that benefits the children within. The wide range and exceptionally high quality of resources supports the broad range of opportunities and activities in which children readily engage. Nothing is left purely to chance in setting the right tone. The meticulous arrangement and organisation of furniture, equipment, artefacts and other materials are deliberate and underpinned by well-researched theories about how they aid children's development.
- Leadership of the early years provision is excellent. Close, systematic oversight of both Children's Houses has secured a consistently high-quality experience for children.
- The highly skilled lead guides know exactly how and when to interact or intervene with the children. They resist doing this too soon, but similarly are alert and highly responsive so that no child flounders unhelpfully. Their deep knowledge of every individual enables them to be successful in this delicate balancing act.
- Working in close partnership with the effective assistant guides, the tracking of the breadth of each child's developmental progress is exacting. It reveals a considerable depth of understanding of each individual child. This information is used incredibly well, for example to judge precisely when each child might be most receptive to additional challenge. Leaders invite and welcome local authority checks of the accuracy of their assessments compared with other settings at the end of the early years. The most recent local authority report, in 2016, was highly complimentary about the school's understanding and exemplification of the standards.
- Thorough individual plans for each child set out a wide range of current activities, with the precise purpose and future direction mapped out. Children's own interests and needs are paramount. As a result, children take great strides in their learning and are very well

placed to move on to the next stage in their journey. Children's phonics and other early reading skills develop strongly.

- Children quickly develop incredibly high levels of independence. They are remarkably self-sufficient. Their conduct demonstrates that they feel safe and secure. Children are confident and purposeful in selecting their activities.
- Guides build excellent partnerships with parents. Staff elicit incredibly detailed information from parents about their children and their development at home, marking the start of a constant and lasting dialogue. As with the rest of the school, there is scope for further partnerships with other professionals, particularly for the early identification and support for children who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- All independent school standards relating to the early years provision are met. Leaders have thorough risk assessments in place and ensure that welfare requirements are met systematically.

School details

Unique reference number	136947
DfE registration number	846/6018
Inspection number	10012927

This inspection was carried out under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008, 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.

Type of school	Other independent school
School category	Independent boarding school
Age range of pupils	1 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	109
Number of part-time pupils	34
Proprietor	Mr R Gueterbock, Mr B Pillai and Ms KE Pearce
Headteacher	Robert Gueterbock
Annual fees (day pupils)	£4,500–£19,500
Telephone number	01273 773764
Website	www.montessoriplace.org.uk
Email address	rob@themontessoriplace.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	2–3 May 2012

Information about this school

- This is a Montessori school, led by Montessori principles and practice, following the training and guidance of the Association Montessori Internationale. The school's stated aim is 'to aid [each] child's natural development from birth to maturity'.
- The school's previous standard inspection took place on 2–3 May 2012. Since then, the school has had successful 'material change' inspections. Following these inspections, the school has been permitted to operate across two sites, expand its age range up to 16, increase its capacity to 130, and, very recently, to admit boarders. The boarding provision was not part of this inspection.

- There are three communities at the original site in Hove. The Infant Community, which provides for children up to the age of three, is registered and inspected separately and was not part of this inspection. The Children's House caters for children aged three to six, and the Elementary for pupils aged six to 12.
- The school's second site, Eason's Green in Framfield, also has a Children's House and an Elementary Community. In addition, a Young People's Community has operated for slightly over a year, catering for ages 12 to 16. Currently, the oldest pupils are aged 13.
- The boarding provision accommodates up to 15 residential pupils, aged 11 to 16, in two separate wings.
- The school uses no alternative provision.
- Few pupils are identified as having special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- A small but growing number of pupils speak English as an additional language.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors visited both sites and observed in the Children’s House, the Elementary Community and the Young People’s Community.
- While observing in each of the communities, inspectors looked at a wide range of pupils’ work and assessments, and talked with them about their learning. Inspectors also heard some pupils read.
- The inspection team spoke with pupils, parents and staff. They also held discussions with the headteacher and senior leaders, who are also the school’s directors and proprietors.
- As part of the wide range of evidence considered, inspectors analysed 32 responses to Ofsted’s online survey, Parent View, and 13 confidential questionnaires returned by staff. They took account of all of the written comments that were added to these.
- Inspectors observed the work of the school at different times of the day. They inspected different aspects of the premises and scrutinised a wide range of documentation relating to the independent school standards, including reviewing the school’s website.

Inspection team

Clive Dunn, lead inspector

Her Majesty’s Inspector

Sue Bzikot

Ofsted Inspector

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Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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