

Lexden Montessori

Inspection report for early years provision

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Inspection date	27 March 2007
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Type of inspection	Integrated
Type of care	Full day care

ABOUT THIS INSPECTION

The purpose of this inspection is to assure government, parents and the public of the quality of childcare and, if applicable, of nursery education. The inspection was carried out under Part XA Children Act 1989 as introduced by the Care Standards Act 2000 and, where nursery education is provided, under Schedule 26 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998.

This report details the main strengths and any areas for improvement identified during the inspection. The judgements included in the report are made in relation to the outcomes for children set out in the Children Act 2004; the National Standards for under 8s day care and childminding; and, where nursery education is provided, the *Curriculum guidance for the foundation stage*.

The report includes information on any complaints about the childcare provision which Ofsted has received since the last inspection or registration or 1 April 2004 whichever is the later.

The key inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding: this aspect of the provision is of exceptionally high quality

Good: this aspect of the provision is strong

Satisfactory: this aspect of the provision is sound

Inadequate: this aspect of the provision is not good enough

For more information about early years inspections, please see the booklet *Are you ready for your inspection?* which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

THE QUALITY AND STANDARDS OF THE CARE AND NURSERY EDUCATION

On the basis of the evidence collected on this inspection:

The quality and standards of the care are good. The registered person meets the National Standards for under 8s day care and childminding.

The quality and standards of the nursery education are good.

WHAT SORT OF SETTING IS IT?

Lexden Montessori is privately owned and run by Lexden Montessori Limited. It opened in 2006 and operates from a converted section of the owner's home. It is situated close to Colchester Town Centre. A maximum of eight children may attend at any one time. The nursery is open from 09:00 to 15:00 each weekday during school term times. All children share an enclosed outdoor play area.

There are currently 10 children aged from two to under five years on roll. Of these three receive funding for early education. Children come from both the local and wider catchment area.

The nursery employs two staff, of these, one holds a relevant early years qualification and one is working towards a qualification.

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PROVISION

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

Children's good health is promoted very well through the effective maintenance of all the required documentation. For example, allergies and medical conditions are recorded so that children's individual needs can be met. Children are protected from cross-infection through the implementation of a sick child policy and appropriate procedures if children become ill while at nursery. Staff obtain clear written instructions from parents about medicines and all relevant permissions are in place to protect children in an emergency. Staff have completed first aid training enabling them to respond and care for children appropriately in the event of an accident.

Staff follow good hygiene procedures in the setting to prevent infection. The children develop a good understanding of actions to take to stop germs spreading through practical everyday experiences. They know they have to wash their hands before cooking activities and talk about the posters in the bathroom reminding them to wash their hands after using the toilet and understand this is to keep them healthy.

Children enjoy choosing from a range of healthy breakfast options such as cereal and dried fruits and talk confidently about foods that are good for them. They enjoy a varied range of interesting and relevant activities and first hand experiences to help them understand where food comes from and how healthy options contribute to their good health. For example, they go for walks to the local greengrocers to select food for their cooking activity and then cook a healthy dessert from the fresh ingredients they have chosen. Children have opportunities to grow their own food in the garden and experience a wide range of different foods during food tasting activities.

Children are developing a very positive attitude to keeping fit through fun activities which stimulate both their minds and bodies. They are motivated to stretch, bend, twist and twirl as they pretend to make a cake during yoga sessions bending their feet to their mouths and then stretching up their legs like candles on a birthday cake. Children show bodily control and spatial awareness as they balance on one leg and then spread out wide, moving to avoid their playmates. Children benefit from fresh air each day when they play outside and go for walks to local amenities.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

Children play and learn in a very calm and well-organised environment where their safety is paramount to staff. Extensive risk assessments and daily safety checklists ensure the premises are safe to enable children to play free from risk of hazards. Robust security systems are in place to prevent children leaving the building unescorted and visitors are checked prior to entry to protect children from harm. Clear child collection procedures are implemented in practice such as ensuring children never leave with adults staff have not met or as agreed by parents and carers.

The premises are very well-maintained, bright and attractive and provide a welcoming environment for the children and their families. Homely touches such as fresh flowers on the tables foster the children's sense of responsibility for their own play space. Staff further support

and encourage children to care for their environment by adopting the Montessori philosophy of tidying away between each activity; this also ensures the play space is kept free from tripping hazards and helps children to learn about the importance of doing things for themselves. The outdoor play space provides an interesting environment where children are able to hide away behind bushes, climb across a zigzagging wooden bridge to the den and dig in the sand.

All furniture and equipment is of excellent quality and is suitable for the range of children being cared for. Staff have created a totally accessible, interesting and stimulating indoor environment in which children flourish as they play and learn. Toys and resources are attractively stored around the rooms at child-height, enabling children to choose what they play with. Making choices and decisions about their play and learning develops children's self-esteem, confidence and independence. If children wish to play with something else they confidently help themselves to toys and resources. For example, a child says "I think I would like to paint now" and quickly and independently assembles all the required materials to enable this to happen. An appropriate range of resources are available for outdoor play and learning is available, although not extensive. Development of equipment for outdoor use has the potential to further promote children's learning in different ways and on a larger scale than is possible indoors.

Children's awareness of how to keep themselves safe is extremely well-fostered through their daily routines and very well-planned activities. Children know that running inside is not safe as they may trip and hurt themselves because this has been effectively reinforced through staff's calm and age-appropriate explanations. While working on topics the children enjoy visits from the emergency services and learn what sounds a smoke alarm makes and how to dial '999'. Children and staff talk through a police issued 10 point safety list including 'stranger danger' so they begin to learn about precautions they will have to take as they become independent in the world outside of their home and nursery.

Children's safety is well-promoted by staff who have a good understanding of safeguarding children. Staff clearly recognise their roles and responsibilities and know how to implement the necessary procedures should they have any concerns for a child's welfare. Parents and carers are also kept fully informed of the setting's responsibilities to protect children.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

Children have a very busy and productive time at nursery and their all round development is fostered well overall through a range of well-planned experiences. The younger children benefit from the teacher's understanding and delivery of the 'Birth to three matters' framework which she applies within the Montessori philosophy. All children respond well to being in such a small group and staff get to know their individual needs and level of attainment well. Staff make constructive observations of what the children already know and can do and use this information to plan activities to enable the children to take their next steps. These measures ensure children continue to make good progress.

Children's growing confidence is promoted as they work alongside caring and supportive staff. They concentrate well on activities because they are varied and interesting. Children demonstrate very good independence skills as they pour out their drinks and cereals and then wash and dry up their utensils when finished. The children's developing language skills are extended through purposeful interaction with staff. Children discover the meaning of new words when staff introduce them to a wider vocabulary in everyday situations. Children's early mathematical skills are developed as they sort, order and classify their play materials.

Children negotiate with each other as they join in small world play, organising where the fire officers and engine should go in the fire station. Children have opportunities to take part in Montessori practical life experiences, pouring, mixing and discussing their ideas of home. However, opportunities for children to develop their ideas based on real or imagined experiences through on-going role play scenarios are limited.

Nursery Education

The quality of teaching and learning is good. Children are making good progress towards the early learning goals. The Montessori teacher has a good understanding of the Foundation Stage and is currently responsible for organising and delivery of the curriculum planning. Children are taught in a variety of ways such as large and small group work and one to one teaching. The level of constructive communication is very good and staff use effective open ended questions to make children think and to work things out for themselves. Staff are interested in what the children say and do and are forming positive relationships.

Staff make regular observations of the children at play and these contribute to their record of progress. These records are kept consistently to provide a clear picture of what the child is able to do in each area of their learning. Effective short term planning ensures the planned activities and experiences are relevant to the children's current level of understanding and cover all six areas of learning.

Children are motivated and concentrate well because they enjoy what they do. They are eager to know more and ask lots of questions. The children are confident speakers and express their ideas and views clearly. Children make remarkable progress in linking sounds and letters with three-year old children already recognising whole words. Children have opportunities to practice their emergent writing skills as they use worksheets, linking pictures and symbols together with pencils and form letters in shallow sand trays. Writing materials are available for children to access at all times to enable them to practise and develop their mark making skills. However, children are provided with few opportunities to write for a purpose such as making lists and writing letters during role play. Staff also miss opportunities to encourage children to make their own marks. For example, enabling the children to write their own names on their foil food container lids or on their artwork.

Children's mathematical skills are promoted very effectively and is an extremely strong area in the children's development. Children use positional language confidently as they play using words such "up, on, over, and into" correctly and "first and second". They learn about measurement as they fill and empty containers and weigh out cooking ingredients and talk about higher and lower as they discuss the heels of shoes. Three-year olds easily recognise numerals up to 10 and count readily beyond this. Children can predict numbers in double figures for example, they know that 27 follows 26. They understand that 12 hours must be a long time as it is a large number. The more able children are solving simple mathematical problems such as addition and subtraction as they move numbered tiles and record their findings understanding the symbols for plus, minus and equals. Children grapple with concepts such as odd and even when using spindles to make patterns.

Children are beginning to make sense of the world around them by investigating and exploring through first-hand experiences. For example, they visit the local shops to develop their sense of the local community and calculate the money they need to buy their purchases. They learn about the passage of time when they discuss the weather and talk about the days of the week and the changing seasons of the year. Children share their news from home telling their friends

and staff about their experiences and special events. Children have good opportunities to use tools and simple equipment to increase their fine motor skills through the range of everyday activities they take part in. For example, they manipulate a hinged scoop to collect small balls and tweezers to transfer tiny objects from one bowl to another. Children confidently use the computer and the associated terminology such as mouse, keyboard and programme.

Children have opportunities to express their individual creativity through a range of art and construction activities through which they begin to communicate their own ideas. For example, a child talks about a blue and white painting "looking like the sky and clouds". Children enjoy music using instruments and their own voices. They use their imagination as they pretend to be snakes, lions and frogs during yoga sessions and they enjoy using small world resources. Children have opportunities to explore their senses as they feel, smell and taste during cooking and food tasting activities.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

The children develop a good sense of belonging to the group. They wear uniforms which helps them identify themselves as being part of a community and engage in whole group activities where they share information about themselves and the nursery. Children see their names on their pegs when they hang up their coats and the rooms are decorated with many photographs of them at play. Children's individuality is also respected by allocation of named drawers where they keep their own private possessions. All children are treated with equal care and concern and have equal access to the toys and equipment. While there are no children currently attending who have additional needs there are appropriate systems in place provide support.

Children are developing a good understanding of the world outside their immediate community as they are introduced to a diverse range of people, customs and beliefs during topics and discussions. Children have opportunities to develop their ideas and thoughts about the wider world as they play with toys and resources which reflect our differences and similarities. Visitors to the setting share their skills and resources helping to bring the curriculum to life. For example, a carpenter helps children understand about safety when using tools and how such skills help us in our everyday lives. Children learn to show respect and consideration to others during their daily routines and through planned experiences. For example, the children are formally introduced to a visitor who they politely welcome into the setting. They listen attentively to a visiting air stewardess who tells them all about the work she carries out and they ask lots of questions based on their own experiences. They enjoy looking at the stamps in passports and finding out where these countries are on the globe. Children take part in fund raising activities and communicate, through letters and photographs, with an orphanage in Africa and they learn about others less fortunate than themselves.

Children understand responsible behaviour because staff set clear and consistent boundaries so that children know what is expected of them. Subsequently children are very well behaved and are polite and helpful. Staff are good role models for behaviour and encourage the children to talk about being kind to each other and members of staff. Children learn about the consequences of their actions because staff talk about how these make them and others feel. Such explanations help children vocalise their feelings and ultimately to manage their own behaviour in a controlled and positive way. For example, the children apologise to a member of staff for not listening during part of circle time to which the member of staff replies "thank you, I know that's just because you are excited because someone is back from holiday today". Children play amicably with each other and understand the fairness of sharing and taking turns.

Children are given lots of praise and encouragement which promotes their confidence, self-esteem and positive attitudes to future learning. Children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is fostered.

Children's needs are being met well because staff work closely with parents and carers which enables all children to achieve and provides continuity between home and the setting. Good quality information about the setting and its working practices is readily available to parents and carers. For example, there is an informative prospectus and the full range of policies and procedures are on display on the information table. Prior placement information is sought from parents and carers enabling staff to get to know children and plan for their individual needs from their first day. Regular progress reports are sent home to enable parents and carers to make a contribution to their child's future learning in the setting. Meetings are held each half term to ensure parents and carers are well informed about their child's progress, how the curriculum is delivered in the setting and to share information about the children. Regular newsletters are sent home highlighting any changes and upcoming events. Parents, carers and staff meet outside of the setting at social events and a parents and carers forum is currently being formed. Parents and carers' views and opinions are valued by the staff and all work closely together to support their children during these formative years. Parents and carers spoken to were very complimentary of the staff and the atmosphere in the nursery as well as being very pleased with the good progress their children have made.

Partnership with parents and carers of nursery funded children is good. Parents and carers have access to good information about the Foundation Stage and how it is used in the setting to help their children make progress. Staff take the time to explain the systems that are in place for teaching and children's learning. Parents and carers have regular opportunities to come into the setting to view and discuss their child's assessment records and are able to make contributions to these records. The curriculum planning is available for parents and carers to see at any time. Future topics are made available to parents and carers so that they can link the children's learning at home if they choose.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

The children are protected and their welfare promoted because there are appropriate systems in place to ensure adults working with the children are suitable to do so. Recruitment and induction procedures are in place and ensure that potential new staff are aware of working practices in the setting.

The manager has many years working in the childcare field and is a qualified Montessori teacher. She works very closely with the registered provider who is also the second member of staff and therefore the deputy person in charge. The deputy is currently working towards gaining a qualification appropriate to the post to enable her to take charge in the absence of the manager. The management team are clearly aware of their responsibilities with regard to the National Standards and work hard together to exceed these requirements in most instances to provide good quality care and education for children.

Effective use of childcare students and volunteers enhances the children's care and learning because this ensures there are good child to adult ratios to provide a high level of adult support to children. Volunteers and student placement workers are effectively supported by the manager who acts as a mentor to ensure their working practices adhere to the nursery ethos.

There is an operational plan which clearly outlines the aims of the nursery and how these will be achieved to promote the children's safety, care and learning. Regular staff meetings ensure all staff and volunteers are well-informed about policies, procedures and future plans for the children's care and learning. The extensive well-written policies underpin the good working procedures in the setting. All the required documentation is maintained to ensure the efficient day-to-day management of the provision.

Leadership and management of nursery funded children is good. The setting is clearly led and managed for the benefit of the children. Regular staff meetings take place to support the delivery of the Foundation Stage curriculum in conjunction with the Montessori philosophy. The manager monitors classroom practice to ensure all staff, students and volunteers continue to work appropriately with children. The management team regularly review the working practices in the nursery and evaluate the impact on the children. This helps them identify areas for improvement which can be included in the nursery development plan. For example, plans are in place to develop the outdoor area so that it can be used more effectively to promote the children's learning.

Overall children's needs are met.

Improvements since the last inspection

Not applicable.

Complaints since the last inspection

Since registration there have been no complaints made to Ofsted that required the provider or Ofsted to take any action in order to meet the National Standards.

The provider is required to keep a record of complaints made by parents, which they can see on request. The complaints record may contain complaints other than those made to Ofsted.

THE QUALITY AND STANDARDS OF THE CARE AND NURSERY EDUCATION

On the basis of the evidence collected on this inspection:

The quality and standards of the care are good. The registered person meets the National Standards for under 8s day care and childminding.

The quality and standards of the nursery education are good.

WHAT MUST BE DONE TO SECURE FUTURE IMPROVEMENT?

The quality and standards of the care

To improve the quality and standards of care further the registered person should take account of the following recommendation(s):

- continue to develop the range of resources to promote the children's development and learning in the outdoor environment; this also applies to nursery education
- increase opportunities for children to access role play scenarios enabling them to develop their imagination based on real and imagined experiences; this also applies to nursery education

- continue to implement the action plan to ensure there is a suitably qualified deputy person in charge who is able to take charge in the absence of the manager.

The quality and standards of the nursery education

To improve the quality and standards of nursery education further the registered person should take account of the following recommendation(s):

- provide children with more frequent opportunities to write for a purpose.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the leaflet *Complaints about Ofsted Early Years: concerns or complaints about Ofsted's role in regulating and inspecting childcare and early education* (HMI ref no 2599) which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk