

Maria Montessori School

Independent school light-touch inspection report

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Reporting inspector	Mark Lindfield 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 Section 49(2) of the Childcare Act 2006.^{3, 4}

This was a light touch educational inspection which focused principally on the quality of education provided by the school; its provision for the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development; the arrangements for safeguarding pupils; and the improvements the school has made since its last inspection.

Information about the school

Maria Montessori School caters for boys and girls aged from two (in the term they reach three) up to 11 years of age. The school opened in 1961 and is run by the Maria Montessori Training Organisation. The school comprises four sites in north-west London; the main site at Lyndhurst Gardens provides an Early Years Foundation Stage education for children as well as providing primary education. Children aged from six to 11 years are taught in two mixed-age 'Elementary' classes. The other three sites at Notting Hill, West Hampstead and Bayswater respectively, provide an Early Years Foundation Stage education for children. The school is registered on the Early Years Register and the Bayswater site is registered on the compulsory and voluntary parts of the childcare register. In total, the school provides an Early Years Foundation Stage education for 97 children.

Across the school's sites, 87 pupils attend full time and 52 part time. In addition, 15 children attend the registered childcare provision for children under three years of age at the Bayswater site. There are 62 children who are in receipt of Nursery education funding. The school provides for two children with a statement of special educational needs. The school was last inspected in February 2008 and the childcare provision at Bayswater was previously inspected separately in December 2008.

The school aims 'to serve children's immediate needs while engendering a love of learning and independence of spirit and a sense of responsibility and care for the world in which we live'.

¹ www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2002/ukpga_20020032_en_14#pt10-ch1-pb4-l1g162

² www.opsi.gov.uk/ACTS/acts2005/ukpga_20050018_en_15#sch8

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.opsi.gov.uk/ACTS/acts2006/ukpga_20060021_en_4#pt3-ch2-pb4-l1g49

Evaluation of the school

Maria Montessori School provides a good overall quality of education. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding, as is their behaviour. The good quality of teaching and curriculum ensures the school meets its aims in encouraging pupils' independence and in developing the responsible and considerate attitudes shown by pupils. The overall effectiveness of the school's Early Years Foundation Stage settings is good. The school's safeguarding arrangements meet all requirements. The school has established all essential policies in line with legislation and guidance. However, pupils' welfare, health and safety are satisfactory because while pupils are safe, there is lack of clarity over individual roles and responsibilities in ensuring fire safety procedures are maintained across the different sites. The school now meets all of the regulations and, since the last inspection, has improved the washroom facilities.

Quality of education

The quality of the curriculum is good and provides a suitable range of planned activities to promote pupils' learning and personal growth. The school's provision for children under five years of age is based on the requirements of Montessori Early Years curriculum and the requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum. The 'Elementary' curriculum for pupils aged from six to 11 years consolidates their development of basic skills well with clear progression and the discrete teaching of English and mathematics. The broad curriculum framework includes botany, zoology, social sciences, art, dance and drama. The curriculum places a strong emphasis on individual needs and encourages pupils to grow into positive, responsible individuals who can cooperate with others. The curriculum has clear and well-structured progression in the majority of subjects so that pupils' progress is good, but development pathways for creative subjects are less well defined.

The curriculum is adapted well for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities through detailed assessments and individual planning to meet their needs. Pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, make good progress because of the calm, supportive environment provided and through the careful monitoring of their progress by staff. The structure of each day encourages pupils to organise and complete their work to their own schedule. This helps pupils to take responsibility for their own learning and they adopt a mature and sensible approach to completing tasks which develops their independence well. Pupils spoke of the responsiveness of the school in arranging trips to follow their individual interests; for example, a small group of pupils visited the Natural History Museum as part of a research project on geological gemstones. The school provides a small range of after-school activities which include board games, yoga and opportunities to learn an additional language.

The quality of teaching and assessment is good. Teachers' subject knowledge and their secure application of Montessori approach help them to use a range of

successful teaching strategies. Teachers model high-quality use of language and develop pupils' language skills through effective questioning. Teachers use resources well to support pupils' learning in a range of areas and this helps to develop pupils' positive attitudes to learning. Staff make excellent use of mathematical resources to support pupils' acquisition of calculation skills and to develop their understanding of place value. For example, pupils accurately calculated the surface area of a cylinder and cone with minimal prompting from staff. The school provides access to information and communication technology (ICT) for older pupils for the presentation of their writing and to research individual topics, and ICT was well used by a pupil to monitor daily, and to record, seismic activity around the world. Throughout the school, teachers build good relationships with pupils and this helps to develop pupils' self-esteem. They get to know individuals well and their encouragement helps pupils to become confident and independent learners.

Teachers' observations of pupils during lessons are leading to well-timed interventions, resulting in a good rate of learning overall. Teachers provide good levels of challenge in English and mathematics and, through their marking and interactions, frequently encourage pupils to take on more complex tasks. However, occasionally in creative subjects, pupils are not challenged to improve their work as much as in mathematics and English.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Across the school, pupils' attitudes to learning are very positive; they speak enthusiastically about the school and their learning. Their enjoyment is evident in their approach to their work and their levels of concentration from an early age. Pupils' attendance is good and, as they arrive in school, they are greeted warmly by staff and their peers. Staff encourage the pupils to express their views and opinions, and to develop their skills of communication. By acting on their views, the school helps pupils to feel valued and an integral part of the school community. In making presentations of their work and explaining their methods to their peers, they contribute to developing other pupils' knowledge and understanding. They participate in careful discussion, showing a willingness to listen to others' viewpoints.

The curriculum helps pupils to develop a good understanding of other cultures and faiths. This is enhanced by presentations from parents and visitors that further develop pupils' cultural understanding. Pupils' behaviour in classrooms and around the school is outstanding and helps to create a calm and purposeful environment. They relate well to each other and work cooperatively in small groups sharing tasks and materials well. Pupils make good contributions to the school and the wider community in their daily actions. Pupils act as editors to produce a printed newsletter of their work and the proceeds are used to make donations to a charity elected by the majority of pupils. In their secure understanding of basic skills pupils are well

prepared for the next stage in their education. As one parent accurately described, 'They are not only well prepared for their next school but for their future life.'

Safeguarding pupils' welfare, health and safety

The school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils' welfare, health and safety and of the children in the Early Years Foundation Stage are satisfactory. This is because, while pupils are safe, there is lack of clarity over the roles and responsibilities of various members of staff in ensuring procedures for fire safety are maintained across the different sites.

Annual fire safety assessments have been completed. Checks on the safety of portable electrical appliances in the main school have been completed. Recruitment procedures are rigorous and the school completes thorough checks on the suitability of staff prior to their appointment. These are well organised and checks are clearly evidenced and documented efficiently in a single central register. The school's safeguarding arrangements and policy are reviewed regularly and against local authority criteria by the board of trustees. Staff, including the designated officers, have received child protection training provided by the local authority and the required refresher training has been booked. Staff ensure that pupils are well supervised and that the school site is secure. Risk assessments are completed to ensure that hazards are identified and monitored. Staff receive appropriate first aid training. The school keeps a careful record of accidents and uses this information to review procedures to promote pupils' health and safety. The school's three-year plan meets the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, as amended, and contains an assessment of each of the sites. The plan includes adjustments made to the buildings and includes the recent completion of disabled toilet facilities.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

The overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage is good and children make good progress in their learning. A varied range of activities and resources, together with a curriculum appropriate to the age range and experience of the children, ensures that they are engaged by their learning. Children develop a good awareness of others, talk together and share thoughtfully. They have a good understanding of being healthy and the need to care for the safety of resources and each other. Staff respect children's autonomy and choices and let children play without interference, helping to promote their good levels of independence and self-confidence. The quality of provision is good; the curriculum is based on the Montessori areas of learning and the requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum, and follows themes that suit children's interests.

The school's provision for children under three years of age is good and meets the requirements of the Early Years Register. For these children, as with older children, there is a good balance of adult-led and child-initiated activities which encourages children to explore through play.

From the earliest age, children are very well supported in their learning by the good quality of resources and by a knowledgeable staff team. The small outdoor spaces in some settings are used effectively for physical exercise, as well as for planting and other activities. Adults engage with children in a measured way, in line with the Montessori philosophy of education. This engenders a calm environment and in some settings creates an outstandingly purposeful learning environment. Where the teaching is outstanding, adults intervene promptly either to present an activity to a child who is not making decisions about what activity to pursue next, or to present a new challenge that will further extend the child's learning. In contrast, children's progress is less pronounced on the occasions where staff are not so prompt and adept at re-engaging children.

Leadership across the different settings is good and those in charge are strongly focused on children's learning and progress. Excellent monitoring of individual children's progress provides leaders with a clear understanding of the relative strengths and weaknesses of the different settings. Leaders' evaluations take careful note of children's reactions to their learning experiences. Best practice is not shared across all the Early Years Foundation Stage settings as much as it might be. The school has good relationships with parents and carers, and successfully develops their understanding of the Montessori approach to children's learning.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

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

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 the opportunities provided for pupils to develop their creative skills through greater challenge and encouragement, and by providing clearer progression pathways across the school
- Ensure that roles and responsibilities for fire safety are clarified and associated paperwork is collated and stored centrally.
- consider sharing the best Early Years Foundation Stage practice across all the Early Years Foundation Stage settings.

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 Early Years Foundation Stage provision

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	Primary		
Date school opened	1961		
Age range of pupils	2–11		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 41	Girls: 46	Total: 87
Number on roll (part-time pupils)	Boys: 18	Girls: 34	Total: 52
Number of children aged 0–3 in registered childcare provision	Boys: 7	Girls: 8	Total: 15
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational needs	Boys: 2	Girls: 0	Total: 2
Annual fees (day pupils)	£ 3,855 – £ 9,555		
Address of school	26 Lyndhurst Gardens, London, NW3 5NW		
Telephone number	020 7435 3646		
Email address	schools@mariamontessori.org		
Headteacher	Karen Pearce		
Proprietor	Maria Montessori Institute		