

Rainbow Montessori School

Independent school standard inspection report

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Reporting inspector	Michèle Messaoudi

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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}

Information about the school

Rainbow Montessori School is an independent, co-educational day school for pupils aged from five to 12 years. It opened in 1982. There are 56 pupils on roll, most of whom live locally. The school serves a diverse community. There are 10 pupils who speak English as an additional language and, of these, three are at an early stage of learning English. Seven pupils have been identified as having special educational needs and/or disabilities and one pupil has a statement of special educational needs. The school is located in West Hampstead, in the London Borough of Camden, in a detached Victorian house. It is part of a group that, along with the junior school, includes three nursery settings in West Hampstead, Highgate and Queens Park. Many of the children attending these nurseries move on to the junior school.

The school aims to bring the best out of each child 'to fulfil their potential both in academic and human terms'. The school was last inspected in May 2008.

Evaluation of the school

Rainbow Montessori School provides a good quality of education and meets its aims. A parent/carer expresses the views of many when saying, 'My child is having an incredibly positive and rewarding experience both in education and emotional development.' Pupils make at least good progress in their academic learning through a good curriculum and good teaching which are centred on nurturing the child's ability to be a competent independent learner. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding and their sense of responsibility and self-discipline result in outstanding behaviour. Since the last inspection, the school has made satisfactory progress in rectifying previous shortcomings in its arrangements for safeguarding pupils and now makes good provision for their welfare, health and safety. Consequently, the school now meets all the regulations for independent schools.

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

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

Quality of education

The good curriculum serves all pupils well and makes good provision for their basic skills and excellent provision for their personal development. It is broad and well balanced between the areas of the Montessori framework which include practical life and sensorial activities, mathematics, language and literacy, and cultural and creative subjects. Pupils have discrete lessons of information and communication technology (ICT) from the age of seven. They learn French and/or Spanish from the age of five, which enhances their language development and their cultural awareness. Personal, social and health education permeates the whole curriculum and is fostered consistently by all staff. Specialist teaching is a strength in physical education (PE), ICT, French, Spanish, art, music, dance and instrumental tuition. Project work is timetabled weekly and enables pupils to make links between several subject areas, which makes their learning more coherent. Reading, writing and numeracy are taught systematically and pupils have many opportunities to develop their creative writing skills. In an ICT lesson, seven-year-old pupils composed imaginative and highly individual stories while acquiring word-processing skills. Pupils' learning is supported very effectively by a good range of resources, particularly the Montessori sensorial resources for mathematics.

Since the last inspection, the school has improved two aspects of the curriculum. A wider range of practical activities is taught across the age range, from squeezing an orange in cooking, to gardening and making costumes for a play. This is enhanced very effectively by hands-on workshops run by museums and other institutions, for example on sea-life and past and present toys. Multicultural education is taught to a deeper level, through half-termly presentations on religious festivals and the involvement of pupils in the planning of presentations and displays. Through a wide range of educational visits and extra-curricular activities, pupils have a wealth of experiences that greatly enrich their learning.

Teaching and assessment are good and enable all pupils to make at least good progress in their academic learning and outstanding progress in their personal development. All teachers and classroom assistants have Montessori teaching qualifications and share a common understanding of the Montessori approach. Since the last inspection, the school has succeeded in reducing the proportion of satisfactory teaching and in increasing the proportion of outstanding practice. However, the programme of professional development has not kept its momentum in the last 18 months, which the school recognises.

Staff prepare a calm learning environment in which all pupils can flourish. They are generally skilful at managing their observations of the pupils so as to support pupils effectively whether they work under the direction of an adult or independently. On occasion, staff do not check on pupils' learning sufficiently early to ensure that time is used wisely and that a suitable level of challenge is maintained. When presenting a new concept, staff ask open-ended questions to probe pupils' understanding and make them aware of which resources they need to complete a task. Consequently,

pupils think very actively about what they learn and they are motivated to find things out for themselves. However, at times, the teacher dominates by talking for too long, which results in more passive learning.

The staff carefully observe each individual pupil and use their assessments to plan their future work so that pupils' individual needs are met closely. In a few instances, they do not always reflect sufficiently on their evaluation of pupils' work to challenge pupils to a consistently high level. Pupils gain an awareness of the quality of their work through verbal and written feedback. Marking is conscientious and helpful but pupils are not always given the opportunity to assess their own learning.

Teachers adapt the curriculum well to meet the needs of pupils who have learning difficulties and they support them effectively through individual educational plans and one-to-one classroom support. Where pupils have statements of special educational needs, the provision meets all the requirements of the statements. The good provision for literacy serves very well the needs of pupils who speak English as an additional language and they make rapid progress in English because staff engage them daily in conversation and model high-level quality language. Consequently, pupils who have linguistic or learning needs make at least good progress, as do their peers.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Pupils' enjoyment of school is reflected in their good attendance and in their high levels of response in class. Through the Montessori approach and the consistent guidance given by staff, pupils develop very high levels of independence, self-discipline, self-confidence and self-esteem. From an early age, they learn to rely on their own abilities and those of their peers and make appropriate decisions about the order in which to tackle tasks and which resources to use. They take responsibility for their own learning and complete a task before moving on to the next one. All adults provide excellent role models and promote the school's values consistently. Pupils feel valued as individuals and listened to. They say, 'Our school is special because our teachers care about us and let us express our opinions.' Pupils develop very positive relationships with others and support each other in maintaining very high standards of behaviour; their behaviour is outstanding. They show respect for diversity and work and play harmoniously with pupils from diverse backgrounds. They are highly considerate and respectful of each other's needs, and so negotiate use of space and resources with great courtesy. Consequently, they feel free from harassment and enjoy exceptionally high levels of emotional well-being.

Pupils contribute to the school community by helping with lunch arrangements, tidying up after activities, participating in plays and concerts and respecting others

and the school environment. Their understanding of British institutions is enriched by educational visits and visitors, for example, from police officers who talk to them about road safety. Pupils contribute to the wider community by selling and buying cakes and helping to run coffee mornings to raise funds for charity. They develop an excellent awareness of different cultures and beliefs through the curriculum and through regular visits to places of worship, museums, theatres, parks, allotments and the local library. The wide range of knowledge and skills which they acquire, along with their good sense of initiative and responsibility, prepares them well for their future.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

The welfare, health and safety of pupils, judged to be satisfactory in the last inspection, are now good. The policies and procedures, aimed at minimising risks in all circumstances, are up to date and implemented consistently. The school has rectified the deficiencies in its safeguarding arrangements that were reported in the last inspection. The staff gain a good understanding of their duties and responsibilities in matters of child protection through a detailed child protection policy and training at appropriate levels and intervals. The employment history of staff and volunteers is verified and references are obtained. Thorough risk assessments of the premises and activities, allied to good supervision and first-aid procedures, result in few accidents. Pupils gain a good awareness of how to keep safe through twice-termly fire drills and daily prompts from staff. For example, during a PE lesson, the teacher made five-year-old pupils think and decide about whether one area of the playground had become slippery after the rain and needed to be marked off limits. Pupils report that they feel very safe and that there is no bullying in school, and parents and carers support these views. Pupils are strongly encouraged to eat and drink healthily and to exercise. They enjoy daily fruit snacks and nutritious meals, have access to water or milk and grow vegetables. In addition to PE activities, they walk to school at least once a week and some choose to scoot or cycle.

The school has devised a three-year accessibility plan that complies with the requirements of the Equality Act 2010.

Suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors

The school has carried out the appropriate checks on the staff and proprietors to ascertain their suitability to work with children before confirming their employment. These checks are recorded on a single central register as required.

Premises and accommodation at the school

The premises are maintained well, and indoor and outdoor space is used wisely to promote safe and effective learning. Many areas have been creatively redecorated,

providing a cheerful environment. The school makes good use of the local park for PE.

Provision of information

The school provides the full range of required information to parents, carers and others, mainly through the school website which is currently being updated and through the parents' handbook. Parents and carers feel well informed of their children's progress through two formal meetings with teachers and through detailed and clearly written annual reports. However, some parents and carers feel insufficiently informed of the allocation of responsibilities among the senior leaders following the recent restructuring of the senior management team. When a pupil has a statement of special educational needs, the school fulfils its obligations by providing the required information to the placing authorities in respect of funding and for the purpose of the reviews of statements.

Manner in which complaints are to be handled

There are suitable procedures to handle complaints promptly and fairly that meet all requirements.

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.

- Eliminate pockets of satisfactory teaching through continuous professional development.
- Help pupils to progress as fast as they can by:
 - widening the range of strategies used to involve them more deeply in the assessment of their own learning
 - developing a more reflective approach to evaluation and assessment so that pupils are challenged to a consistently high level and enabled to make outstanding progress.
- Ensure that parents and carers are properly and promptly informed of any changes affecting school life.

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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School details

School status	Independent		
Type of school	Montessori day primary school		
Date school opened	1982		
Age range of pupils	5–12 years		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 32	Girls: 24	Total: 56
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational needs	Boys: 1	Girls: 0	Total: 1
Number of pupils who are looked after	Boys: 0	Girls: 0	Total: 0
Annual fees (day pupils)	£9,420		
Address of school	13 Woodchurch Road London NW6 3PL		
Telephone number	020 7328 8986		
Email address	rms@rainbowmontessori.co.uk		
Headteacher	Miss Helen McStay		
Proprietor/Principal	Mrs Linda Madden		

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.



23 September 2011

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Rainbow Montessori School, London NW6 3PL

Thank you for welcoming me so warmly when I visited your school recently. I greatly enjoyed meeting you, seeing you learn and talking to you. You go to a good school where adults work hard to prepare you for the future.

You make good progress in your subject areas and you make excellent progress in your personal development. You enjoy school and your attendance is good. You particularly enjoy lots of practical activities and school trips. You like your teachers and teaching assistants and they care for you well. I was really impressed by the fact that you are keen to learn and get on with your work independently. This is because your teachers know you as individuals and teach you well. You are extremely well behaved, get on really well with each other and make a good contribution to school life. You feel very safe and really understand the importance of eating healthy foods and taking exercise.

In order to make your good school even better, I have asked the school to:

- train teachers and teaching assistants continuously to make sure that they can always teach you all well or very well
- help you all to make even faster progress by showing you exactly how well you have done and how you can make your work even better, and by giving you even bigger challenges
- make sure that your parents and carers are properly and promptly informed of any changes in school life.

You will help your teachers achieve this if you all continue to work hard and show the same enthusiasm and sense of responsibility that I saw during the inspection.

Yours sincerely

Michèle Messaoudi
Lead inspector