

# The Pier Head Preparatory Montessori School

Independent school standard inspection report

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DfE registration number	211/6399
Unique Reference Number (URN)	136250
URN for registered childcare	EY386141
Inspection number	385144
Inspection dates	27–28 September 2011
Reporting inspector	James Henry

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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.<sup>1, 2</sup>

The inspection of registered provision was conducted under Section 49(2) of the Childcare Act 2006.<sup>3, 4</sup>

## Information about the school

The Pier Head Preparatory Montessori School opened in 2009. It is situated on the first floor of a community and activity centre in Wapping, in the borough of Tower Hamlets. The aim of the school is to 'educate the whole child and honour the diversity of each individual' using the Montessori approach to education. The school is registered for children aged from two to seven years of age. At present there are 33 children on roll aged from two to five years of age and 20 children are entitled to receive government nursery funding. All the children in the school are in the Early Years Foundation Stage and there are no children with a statement of special educational needs. The Early Years Foundation Stage comprises a nursery class for children aged two to three years and a pre-preparatory class for children aged four and five years. There are 25 children in the nursery class who attend part time and eight children in the pre-preparatory class who attend full time. The school's childcare provision, for those aged two and three years, was also inspected at the same time as the education provision, and the findings are included in this report. The school's childcare provision was last inspected in 2009. This is the school's first inspection of its education provision.

## Evaluation of the school

The Pier Head Preparatory Montessori School provides a good quality of education and effectively meets its aims. The overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage is good. Good leadership and management ensures the delivery of a good Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum, using the Montessori approach to education. Teaching and assessment are good, with teachers planning activities that meet the needs of individual children and consequently children make good progress. The good welfare, health and safety provision, including safeguarding arrangements, shows the high level of commitment of staff to the care of the children. The school

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<sup>1</sup> [www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2002/32/contents](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2002/32/contents).

<sup>2</sup> [www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2005/18/contents](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2005/18/contents).

<sup>3</sup> 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.

<sup>4</sup> [www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2006/21/contents](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2006/21/contents).

meets all of the statutory requirements for the Early Years Foundation Stage and most of the regulatory requirements for independent schools, except for several regarding the provision of information to parents, carers and others and the manner in which complaints are handled.

## **Quality of education**

The quality of the curriculum is good with all the required areas of learning in the Early Years Foundation Stage being effectively covered. Teachers have successfully integrated the Montessori curriculum to complement and enhance the requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum. For example, during child-initiated activities, children can choose to use Montessori games and equipment that successfully promote their reasoning skills as well as developing their ability to become independent in their learning. Again, during adult-led activities there was good use of Montessori equipment to develop children's basic skills. This was seen when staff engaged children in a Montessori pattern game to effectively build their understanding of counting and multiplication. The curriculum for children in the nursery class has a strong focus on learning through practical activities based on the children's senses. For example, children were observed playing with flour and experiencing its colour and texture through mixing and kneading it. One child covered a toy castle with flour and then began to explain that it was covered in snow.

Curriculum planning focuses effectively on developing children's physical and creative skills through activities such as designing a self-portrait through using materials that required cutting and pasting. In the pre-preparatory class there was good use of information and communication technology (ICT) with children developing their reading and creative skills through the effective use of computer programs. Children in the pre-preparatory class also benefit from learning some basic French and having swimming lessons. The provision for children's personal and social development is good and a wide variety of opportunities are taken to encourage the children to share, cooperate and respect and help others. Children enjoy and benefit from activities that enrich the curriculum such as a range of interesting visits to local museums, engaging in gardening and receiving visits from the police. Such activities help increase children's knowledge and understanding of the world at large and adult life.

The quality of teaching and assessment is good. Relationships are good throughout the school with staff knowing each child as an individual and working effectively to meet their needs. Staff have a good understanding of the requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage and there is an effective balance of adult-led activities and those that children can choose for themselves. Consequently, children make good progress in all areas of learning and achieve at least, and in some cases above, national expectations by the end of the early years phase. In communication, language and literacy, activities are planned that develop children's pre-reading skills, such as singing songs that develop children's sense of rhythm, and children are given opportunities to draw and make patterns in sand to develop their basic writing skills. Older children in the pre-preparatory class were reading and writing quite

independently as appropriate for their age. They also had a good grasp of basic number bonds and could count and multiply simple numbers. All children were making good progress in their physical and creative development with staff using the classrooms to provide stimulating opportunities for children to learn through play and exploration, for example, in challenging children to build a truck using plastic bricks. However, there were a few occasions when staff missed teaching opportunities to further develop children's understanding and use of language. The school works effectively to ensure that children have access to outdoor activities every day by using the local park. This also is used to develop the children's knowledge and understanding of the world as opportunities to observe and discuss the environmental surroundings are taken, such as the tides and pollution of the River Thames which runs next to the park. However, teachers' planning is not always effective in linking outdoor activities to children's learning in the classroom. Staff accurately observe children's learning and use their assessments to inform their planning and monitor children's progress in the different areas of learning. These assessments are recorded formally and used to both inform parents and carers and ensure an accurate profile is created of each child's progress.

### **Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils**

The provision for children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Children enjoy school and are keen to learn because of the caring and welcoming environment provided by the staff. Consequently, attendance is good. Children settle quickly and staff encourage children to become independent learners. A good example was when after 'circle time' children in the nursery class quite instinctively carried their own chairs to an activity that they chose for themselves. This results in children developing a good sense of self-discipline and awareness of others, and as a result, their behaviour is good. They learn quickly to share and cooperate and develop good social skills. For example at dinner time, after sitting and sharing a meal, older children helped the younger ones tidy away their plates. This type of activity, along with helping to keep the classroom tidy, helps children develop a sense of responsibility and make a contribution to school life.

Children's cultural development is promoted well through various curriculum themes. For example, a topic 'All about me', based on children's own experiences, encourages them to take pictures of different people in their families and then share and talk about them with other children. Given the diversity of children's cultural backgrounds this approach is effective in developing their awareness of different cultures from the experience of their friends in school. Opportunities for parents and carers to come and talk about religious festivals such as Diwali and in producing a nativity play at Christmas help support children's spiritual development. The school is effective in promoting children's sense of awe and wonder in the world around them. For example, children took care of some caterpillars, watched them grow into butterflies and then released them into their natural environment.

## **Welfare, health and safety of pupils**

The welfare, health and safety of children is good. Procedures to ensure the safety of children are robust with staff being fully vetted before being allowed to work in school. All the required policies and procedures are in place and fully understood by staff. The designated person for child protection has undertaken the required training provided by the local authority and staff have received appropriate training in their child protection roles and responsibilities. Risk assessments are regularly carried out across all aspects of the school's work, especially when taking children to the local park. There is a suitable fire risk assessment and evacuation procedures and fire drills are held regularly and formally recorded. Good procedures for administering first aid and medicines are in place and a key member of staff has received training in paediatric first aid. The high level of commitment by staff to the care of children ensures that they are well supervised both in and out of school and admissions and attendance records are maintained as required.

Children, according to their age, have a developing sense of how to stay safe. Older children have a good awareness of the importance of being healthy as they quite readily explained about the importance of eating fruit and vegetables. The school encourages pupils to stay healthy through providing opportunities for active outdoor play, physical education and providing healthy lunches and fruit throughout the day. The school meets requirements in respect of the Equality Act 2010.

## **Suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors**

The school has undertaken the necessary procedures to ensure that all staff and others are checked for their suitability to work with children and the information is entered in a single central record as required.

## **Premises and accommodation at the school**

The school is accommodated on the first floor of a community and activity centre and there is a lift available. The school comprises two large, well-decorated classroom areas, a kitchen area and appropriate toilet and washing facilities, that include provision for any child who may be ill. There are also appropriate facilities and procedures for nappy changing. There are no direct outdoor play facilities, although the school effectively overcomes this through, normally twice a day, using the local park and dedicated children's area. This has suitable soft matting surface and well-maintained large play equipment. It is also easily accessible from the school and provides suitable physical challenge for children of all ages. Plans to develop a dedicated outdoor play area in the grounds of the community and activity centre are being proposed and considered.

## **Provision of information**

The school provides a wide range of information for parents and carers through its prospectus and website. The overwhelming majority of parents and carers who completed the questionnaire were supportive of the school. However, the school does not meet regulations with regard to providing information about the academic performance of children during the preceding school year, the number of complaints registered and the number of staff employed at the school and their qualifications. In addition, the school does not provide an annual account to the local authority of the income and expenditure occurred where a child is funded by the local authority.

## **Manner in which complaints are to be handled**

The school has written procedures for dealing with complaints and this is available in school or on the school website for any parent or carer requesting it. However, it does not meet regulations with regard to providing the establishment of an independent panel to hear a complaint if a parent or carer is dissatisfied with the response to a written complaint. The complaints procedure does not allow for parents or carers to attend a panel hearing if they wish or for written records to be kept.

## **Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage**

The overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage is good as is the quality of leadership and management, provision and outcomes. The headteacher and early years setting leader have a good understanding of the requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage. They are effective in evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of the school and have clearly identified areas for improvement, such as developing the facilities for outdoor learning. However, they have also been effective in putting in place strategies to ensure that the constraints of the building do not unduly impact on the outdoor learning of the children. For example, the creative use of the local park not only promotes children's physical development but also their knowledge and understanding of the world around them.

The school has established good links with the local authority early years advisory teachers to support the professional development of staff, especially in the development of their teaching and the accurate use and recording of assessments to monitor children's progress. Consequently, staff are effective in securing good outcomes for children through good provision in both teaching and in the high level of care shown.

The provision for children under three is also good and meets the requirements of the Early Years Register. Staff effectively support and encourage young children to explore different activities and talk about what they are learning. They also make good use of praise to develop children's self-confidence, for example when children set out simple resources for an activity or tidy up afterwards. Good relationships are

established with parents and carers who value the work the school undertakes with their children. The school has sufficiently qualified staff to meet the requirements necessary for the different-aged children in the Early Years Foundation Stage.

## Compliance with regulatory requirements

The proprietor has ensured that the school meets The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010, schedule 1 ('the Regulations'), with the exception of those listed below.<sup>5</sup>

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of the provision of information (standards in part 6) and must:

- ensure the following information is made available to parents and carers of children and parents and carers of prospective children, and on request to the Chief Inspector, the Secretary of State, or an independent inspectorate
  - particulars of academic performance during the preceding school year
  - details of the complaints procedure adopted by the school, together with details of the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year
  - the number of staff employed at the school, including temporary staff, and a summary of their qualifications (paragraph 24(1)(b)).
  
- provide an annual account of income and expenditure and submit it to the local authority or on request to the Secretary of State, where a pupil who is registered at the school is wholly or partly funded by the local authority (paragraph 24(1)(h)).

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of the manner in which complaints are to be handled (standards in part 7) and must:

- provide for the establishment of a hearing by an independent panel appointed by the proprietor of at least three people who have not been directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint if parents and carers are not satisfied with the response to a written complaint (paragraph 25(f))
- provide that one person on the panel hearing a complaint is independent of the management and running of the school (paragraph 25(g))
- ensure that the procedure allows for parents and carers to attend a panel hearing and, if they wish, to be accompanied (paragraph 25(h))
- ensure that the complaints procedure provides for the panel to make findings and recommendations and that the procedure stipulates that a copy of the findings and recommendations are sent by electronic mail or given to the complainant and, where relevant, the person complained about, and the procedure is available for inspection on the school premises by the proprietor and the headteacher (paragraph (25)(i))

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<sup>5</sup> [www.legislation.gov.uk/uk/si/2010/1997/contents/made](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uk/si/2010/1997/contents/made).

- provide for written records to be kept of all complaints, indicating whether they were resolved at the preliminary stage or whether they proceeded to a panel hearing (paragraph (25)(j)).

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:

- strengthen teachers' planning to establish more links in children's learning in the Early Years Foundation Stage between the outdoor and indoor learning activities.

## 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

<b>School status</b>	Independent		
<b>Type of school</b>	Preparatory Montessori School		
<b>Date school opened</b>	19 May 2009		
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	2–7 years		
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed		
<b>Number on roll (full-time pupils)</b>	Boys: 5	Girls: 3	Total: 8
<b>Number on roll (part-time pupils)</b>	Boys: 11	Girls: 14	Total: 25
<b>Number of children aged 0–3 in registered childcare provision</b>	Boys: 11	Girls: 14	Total: 25
<b>Number of pupils with a statement of special educational needs</b>	Boys: 0	Girls: 0	Total: 0
<b>Number of pupils who are looked after</b>	Boys: 0	Girls: 0	Total: 0
<b>Annual fees (day pupils)</b>	£ 6,800		
<b>Annual fees (childcare)</b>	£ 3,600		
<b>Address of school</b>	3 Shadwell Pierhead Glamis Road Wapping London E1W 3TD		
<b>Telephone number</b>	020 7481 0202		
<b>Email address</b>	thepierheadprep@yahoo.co.uk		
<b>Headteacher</b>	Miss Emma Kohl		
<b>Proprietor</b>	Miss Emma Kohl		

**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.**



29 September 2011

Dear Children

**Inspection of The Pier Head Preparatory Montessori School, London E1W 3TD**

This letter is for your parents and carers to read to you.

I would like to thank you for making me feel so welcome when I visited your school recently. I enjoyed meeting you and watching you work with your teachers in lessons and in the local park. All the staff work hard to help you learn and enjoy school. You go to a good school that gives you a good standard of education and cares for you well.

Here are some of the other good things that we found out about your school.

- You enjoy school and like being with your friends.
- You are keen to learn and to do your best and make good progress.
- You behave well and treat each other with respect and are always willing to help around school.
- You enjoy taking part in the activities that the school has to offer.
- You are always willing to help other people in school.

To help the school get even better I have asked that your teachers make sure that when you are outside in the park they give you activities that will also help you with your learning in the classroom.

You can help too by continuing to be kind, listening to your teachers and helping each other in school.

Yours sincerely

James Henry  
Lead inspector