

Soaring High Montessori School

Independent school standard inspection report

DfE registration number	881/6058
Unique Reference Number (URN)	135594
Inspection number	388417
Inspection dates	31 January – 1 February 2012
Reporting inspector	David Young

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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

Soaring High Montessori School is an independent day school for boys and girls aged four to 11 years of age, which opened in 2008. In January 2010 it moved to its current premises on the outskirts of Coggeshall, Essex. There are currently 36 pupils on roll, of whom four are part-time. There are 10 children in the Early Years Foundation Stage of whom six are in receipt of nursery funding. One pupil has a statement of special educational needs. The school follows the educational principles of Maria Montessori. The school was last inspected in March 2009.

A request was made to the Department for Education for a material change to extend the school into additional accommodation on the same site and to increase the number of pupils for which the school is registered to a total of 70, including the Early Years Foundation Stage.

The school aims to 'develop motivated, enthusiastic learners that have respect for themselves, their community and environment'.

Evaluation of the school

Soaring High School provides a good quality of education for all of its pupils, including the children in the Early Years Foundation Stage, and meets its aims effectively. It has made continuous, planned improvement since the time of its last inspection, including the move to new, more suitable premises. There are a number of outstanding aspects in the school's provision: the quality of the curriculum; arrangements for the personal development of pupils and their resultant behaviour; and implementation of all aspects of provision for pupils' welfare and safeguarding. The school meets all the regulations for continuing registration as an independent school. The request for a material change was considered during the course of this inspection and it is recommended that the requested change be agreed.

Quality of education

The quality of the curriculum is outstanding. The curriculum upholds the Montessori philosophy and practices in which pupils have individual work plans, enabling them

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

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

to work effectively at their own pace. The pupils are clear about the objectives to be achieved and the activities to be undertaken to follow their individual learning journeys. Children in the Reception and Year 1 establish excellent work habits, responding with interest and enquiry to the learning activities prepared for them. They have access to a suitable external learning area and are able to extend their learning naturally into this wider environment. This is an improvement since the last inspection. Older pupils work in mixed age groups which are organised within Key Stages 1 and 2. They take on the skills of managing their own individual learning which are successfully established in the Early Years. Pupils speak with enthusiasm about the 'Great Lessons' which take place every Monday and form the stimulus for much individual and small group work across a wide range of subjects, including history, geography, science and much more. A recent letter from a parent states: 'I enjoyed the privilege of joining the school for the Great Lesson at the end (of the story) the children were all excited to get started on their research. It was a real insight into how the children manage themselves; it was fascinating to see the variety of work generated'.

The National Curriculum standards have been carefully mapped against the activities and resources of the Montessori curriculum, ensuring that pupils' work develops progressively in line with national expectations. Pupils have a significant amount of choice about the order in which they pursue the objectives in their learning plans during the three-hour work cycle on the four remaining mornings of the week. Here the emphasis is on the development of appropriate wide-ranging knowledge and skills in literacy and numeracy. Their individual progress is carefully monitored and guided by their teachers, and they use this freedom with responsibility and maturity. The pupils' management of their own learning is impressive. They respond positively to an appropriate level of challenge and are proud of the progress they are making in a number of subjects. A range of additional experiences, including music, physical education, drama, French and creative subjects complement the academic emphasis of the morning curriculum and are enjoyed by the children. The school's approach to learning is deliberately holistic; pupils' successfully combine new academic knowledge with outstanding development of their personal and social skills. Pupils with special educational needs are provided with sufficient adult support and guidance to ensure that they, too, benefit immensely from the individualised approach to learning.

The quality of teaching and assessment is good in all respects and sometimes outstanding. Teachers create high expectations, provide a well-planned structure for learning, and ensure that the needs of each individual pupil are understood and catered for. The quality of the Montessori learning resources is excellent and these are supplemented with books, pictures, access to computers, and formal written activities which create a rich and varied environment for learning. While information and communication technology is readily available in classrooms, this is not always used as extensively as it might be to encourage pupils to research, record and present their work. Pupils have good opportunities to write in a variety of forms but there is insufficient emphasis on the use of extended writing to ensure that the higher attaining pupils develop expression, structure and accuracy in their use of language. Pupils' work is assessed systematically and the results of this assessment

enable teachers to revise targets and extend individual learning plans effectively. Although pupils are encouraged to work at their own pace, they not allowed to waste time or to avoid the challenges of their less favoured areas of learning. Occasionally, the pace of learning or the level of challenge for an individual may reduce, but the majority of pupils cover extensive new learning at an appropriate level every day. Teachers have an outstanding understanding of how each pupil learns best and of how to stimulate effective progress. The school's approach to learning enables the staff to identify the extent of coverage of the curriculum and to compare this with age-related expectations. At present, work is not graded using the National Curriculum levels and, as a result, teachers do not have an immediate awareness of whether the extent of progress over time is sufficient for each individual given their various starting points. However, as a result of good attitudes to the management of their learning, the children in the Early Years make good progress against the Early Learning Goals, and older pupils are making good progress across the breadth of the curriculum. Pupils with special educational needs and those who have joined the school with previously challenging behaviour are integrated into the full life of the school and make good progress both academically and socially. There are examples of exceptional progress in learning for a number of pupils with very different starting points.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils is outstanding. The youngest children in the Early Years learn to play and to work independently and to socialise successfully. The learning environment throughout the school builds on this early start in a manner which develops self-esteem, personal security and a recognition that all members of the school share the responsibility for the success of the community. As a result, pupils' behaviour is outstanding. All those pupils who completed the inspection questionnaire stated that they enjoy school and their high level of attendance demonstrates their commitment. Pupils talk enthusiastically about how they enjoy a wide range of different activities and take for granted the expectation that they will organise and take the lead in their own learning. Pupils willingly take on responsibility for preparing and presenting aspects of the weekly Great Lesson and are proud of their contributions. Pupils are reflective about themselves and the progress they are making; they demonstrate self-confidence without arrogance. This attitude is derived from the high status they are given in all aspects of the life of the school. Pupils have a number of opportunities to take responsibility and, for example, take part in various social and fund-raising activities in the local community. The curriculum is continuously enriched with visitors to the school and visits to places of relevance to the work studied in school. Pupils speak positively about the range of planned enrichment activities beyond the school gates. Involvement in these activities contributes positively to pupils' social and cultural development.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

Arrangements for the welfare, health and safety of pupils are outstanding. The school implements a range of comprehensive policies effectively, including detailed

procedures for the management of behaviour, bullying, safeguarding and visits out of school. The training and development of staff is given a high priority and results in high quality provision for child protection, first aid and fire safety. All aspects of health and safety are kept under regular review and risk assessments are completed and updated within appropriate timescales. Appropriate arrangements for the recruitment of staff are well documented and implemented consistently. Healthy lifestyles are given a high priority and pupils demonstrate that they are strongly aware of issues related to their own safety and health, for example detailing the contents of a healthy lunchbox. All members of staff contribute diligently to the provision of a safe and secure environment within which pupils thrive. Pupils are able to respond confidently to the high level of trust and responsibility which they are given because they know that the staff are continually alert to promote their welfare. The school complies with the requirements of the Equality Act 2010.

Suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors

All the required checks on the suitability of staff and proprietor to work with children have been completed. Details of all checks are recorded appropriately in a single central register.

Premises and accommodation at the school

The school is accommodated in a converted barn which was originally refurbished to provide office accommodation. This has been skilfully and sensitively adapted to provide appropriately sized, safe spaces for learning, suitable for the implementation of the Montessori curriculum. The premises are maintained and decorated to a high standard and enhanced by a carefully planned external environment for play and recreation.

The additional building proposed as an extension to the school accommodation is similarly refurbished to a high standard. This new accommodation will provide ample space to re-locate the Year 1 pupils and Reception children in the Early Years Foundation Stage. The proposed room has suitable access to an outside area which will be developed as an extension to the indoor classroom. There are adequate toilets and washrooms, together with an additional space large enough to accommodate a dining room for all pupils in the school. The new building will also accommodate the offices and reception area for the school. Firm arrangements are in place for a fire risk assessment to be completed and the school is aware of the need to 'blank off' low level electrical fittings. It is recommended that these additional premises be registered for up to 20 pupils, and that the registered number on the school roll be increased to 70 pupils across the age range of four to 11 years.

Provision of information

The school provides comprehensive and up-to-date information for parents and carers, including access to all the required school policies. The prospectus and the website enable parents, carers and prospective parents to understand the philosophy, policies and procedures of the school. These documents are supplemented with regular newsletters and updated details of school arrangements.

Parents and carers are provided with detailed annual reports of the progress made by their children across all areas of the curriculum.

Manner in which complaints are to be handled

The school has appropriate procedures for the management of any complaints.

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:

School

- extend the existing arrangements for the assessment of pupils' progress to include a statistical measure which will provide a clear evaluation of the extent of progress over time
- increase the use of ICT in pupils' learning, recording and presentation of their work
- provide additional opportunities for pupils to produce extended pieces of writing in which their ideas are introduced, extended and concluded expressively and accurately.

Early Years Foundation Stage

- ensure that the required fire safety risk assessment for the new accommodation is completed as planned
- ensure that, as planned, all low level electrical sockets are 'blanked off' in the classroom proposed for use by the children in the Reception and Year 1 class.

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 primary		
Date school opened	May 2008		
Age range of pupils	4–11 years		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 15	Girls: 17	Total: 32
Number on roll (part-time pupils)	Boys: 3	Girls: 1	Total: 4
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)	£5,685		
Address of school	Purley Farm Colne Road Coggeshall CO6 1TH		
Telephone number	01376 564392		
Email address	soaringhighschool@btconnect.com		
Headteacher	Sarah Rowledge		
Proprietor	Sarah Rowledge		

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.



2 February 2012

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Soaring High Montessori School, Coggeshall, CO6 1TH

Thank you for your welcome when we visited your school. We enjoyed our visit, including the opportunity to speak with a number of you. The inspection judged that Soaring High School provides a good quality of education for all of you from the Reception to Year 6. We were particularly pleased to see:

- how well the youngest children are learning your numbers and words, and what good imaginations you have
- that your questionnaires and comments show that you enjoy school, particularly the Great Lessons
- the way in which you organise your own work and take this responsibility very seriously
- the amount of work which you complete and the way in which you concentrate for long periods of time
- your very good cooperation in your work, working together and sharing your ideas
- your understanding of how to live a healthy life, and particularly your knowledge about healthy foods
- the way you care for one another and try very hard to make sure that no-one is left out of activities in the classroom and the playground
- the knowledge that your teachers have about each one of you and how hard they work to make sure that you can learn and make progress.

In many ways your teachers are doing an excellent job but we have asked them to make sure that you make more use of computers in the classroom to record and present your work. We have also asked them to make sure that you are encouraged to write more stories and reports which are detailed and interesting, using good spelling and punctuation. You can help your school to be great by continuing to work as hard as you do and by helping each other to do your best.

With all best wishes for the future.

Yours sincerely
David Young
Lead inspector