

The Meadows Montessori School

Tuddenham Road, Ipswich, IP4 3QJ

Inspection dates

4–6 March 2013

Overall effectiveness

Adequate **3**

Pupils' achievement Adequate 3

Pupils' behaviour and personal development Outstanding 1

Quality of teaching Adequate 3

Quality of curriculum Good 2

Pupils' welfare, health and safety Adequate 3

Leadership and management Adequate 3

Summary of key findings

This school is adequate because

- While all key inspection judgements are at least adequate, there are some areas where the school must improve to be judged good.
- While teaching is typically good, there are inconsistencies which have yet to be identified by leaders and addressed by staff.
- The school is not accurately assessing the progress of each pupil over time or giving parents and carers high quality information on their child's progress.
- Leaders are not systematically monitoring or challenging staff. There is no effective appraisal system in place to hold staff to account for the progress of pupils.
- Self-evaluation is not robust. Insufficient time is being afforded to developing the school and to ensuring that staff are familiar with recent changes in the independent school regulations and the Department for Education's guidance.

The school has the following strengths

- Pupils are fully engaged in learning; they work and play together harmoniously.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. This has a positive impact on pupils' learning and progress.
- The curriculum, including wider activities, is well matched to pupils' needs and interests.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

- The school meets schedule 1 of The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010, as amended by The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2012 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements.

Information about this inspection

- This inspection was carried out with half a day's notice.
- The inspector observed eight staff teaching or supporting pupils over a period of six hours.
- The inspector looked at pupils' journals; their work and individual achievement folders. The inspector heard four pupils read and observed three other pupils being heard reading.
- Meetings were held with the proprietor and all senior staff. Pupils were spoken to throughout the inspection to check on their views.
- The inspector looked at the school's documentation including policy documents, schemes of work, staff training files, and records relating to the welfare, health and safety of pupils. She checked on the school's compliance with the regulations for independent schools.
- The inspector took account of the views expressed in 21 responses from parents on Parent View and two questionnaires from staff.

Inspection team

Jane Melbourne, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The Meadows is an independent day school registered for 55 pupils between the ages of three and 11 years. It usually admits children from the age of four and a half years. There are currently 45 pupils on roll, which includes a very small number of pupils who speak English as an additional language. A few pupils have been identified as having special educational needs. There is currently no pupil with a statement of special educational needs.
- The school follows the ethos and teaching methods of Maria Montessori and aims to provide each child with an individual learning experience, thus enabling pupils to learn at their own pace within an environment that has been designed to nurture independence and self-confidence. The school provides an extended school day for its own pupils, which includes before- and after-school care.
- The school opened in September 2008 as a continuation of the separate Montessori nursery owned by the sole proprietor and occupying accommodation on the same site, which is within the grounds of a sports centre. There are three classrooms: one primarily for Nursery, Reception and Year 1 pupils, one for Years 2, 3 and 4, and one for Years 5 and 6.
- All pupils are off timetable on Fridays and the school provides alternative education on this day. Pupils work in cross-age teams and undertake woodland activities, drama and singing, healthy living sessions including exercise and human biology, art and craft.
- The school was last inspected in November 2009.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Better track each pupil's progress in all key areas, so that where pupils' progress is less than good, the school is able to identify this immediately and accelerate learning.
- Ensure that all pupils' records are maintained to the same high standards and that all pupils' learning records are updated regularly for parents and carers to view.
- Monitor the performance of staff more effectively, ensuring that they teach consistently well and are held to account for the progress of all pupils for whom they have responsibility.
- Develop a more comprehensive process of assessing risk and keeping abreast of changes in regulation and inspection. Ensure that school policies are updated regularly, continue to meet the needs of the school and are understood by staff.

Inspection judgements

Pupils' achievement

Adequate

Pupils' achievement is adequate overall. Not every pupil has been assessed accurately upon entry and pupils' progress is not monitored carefully enough to ensure they make consistently good progress in all subjects. Pupils make better progress in lessons which are well planned and taught, and where they make good choices in their personalised programme. The majority of children usually meet or exceed most of the early learning goals expected of them by the end of their Reception Year. This is due to them settling in well, particularly where there has been transition across from the school's sister nursery. Children speak confidently. Most are making good progress with their reading due to the favourable staffing ratios and good levels of individual support. However, they are not all secure with the sounds that letters make or how the sounds change when letters are blended together (phonics). They make very good progress in their understanding of number, often progressing very quickly to working with two digit numbers. Their physical skills are developed through outside activities and opportunities to extend their coordination through balancing and climbing. Despite the provision of a range of equipment to promote children's fine motor skills, such as using small beads and tools, insufficient attention is given to rectifying poor pencil grip. Work varies between being very challenging, for example in designing a successful ramp for small cars to run down, to having limited learning value when children colour in worksheets. Therefore, the youngest children in the school are not consistently progressing as well as they could in all areas of learning.

Pupils' achievement is adequate as they move up the school. In some sessions, pupils make good progress and their journals indicate an increased understanding of mathematical concepts or physical processes. Opportunities in practical life extend pupils' understanding of modern day technology very well as they take apart tools and gadgets and then reconstruct them. There are weekly sessions of spelling, handwriting practice and creative writing. Work is thoroughly marked, but pupils do not always go back to make the necessary corrections to improve. Some of the boys are not progressing as well as the girls in their handwriting and they need further encouragement to write at length. Despite being heard to read regularly, and showing reasonable comprehension of what they have read, not all pupils are confident in reading aloud. They do not always apply their knowledge of letter sounds accurately to work out less familiar words. Therefore, not every pupil is making consistently good progress in reading and writing. Although pupils do not sit standardised assessments, the majority of pupils will achieve standards in their work at the end of Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 which are in line with national expectations. Some pupils with special educational needs or who speak English as an additional language, despite being given additional support and encouragement to succeed, may not achieve in line with their peers nationally, particularly in reading and writing. Pupils who have been at the school for a sustained period are progressing more consistently well than those who have joined more recently or during a school year. Typically, these pupils take longer to get used to maintaining their journals and understanding the necessity to repeat and rehearse essential learning, to that ensure their learning is secure before moving on.

Pupils' behaviour and personal development

Outstanding

Pupils' behaviour and personal development is outstanding. Staff have very high expectations of pupils as individuals and as part of the school community. This is reinforced as soon as pupils come into the school, as ground rules and routines are established early on. Therefore, Nursery and Reception children very quickly understand how they should go about their work and play. They share the equipment well and are able to work together in teams to solve problems and work out solutions. Pupils who find it harder to behave well are effectively supported and good behaviour is promoted positively. There are only extremely rare incidences of hurtful behaviour.

The school is a happy place to be and pupils thrive in classes with small numbers where they are given exceptionally good levels of adult support. Staff are caring and have developed trusting relationships with pupils. Consequently, pupils feel able to talk to staff if there is something worrying them. All pupils approach their individual work programme responsibly. They usually make wise choices about how to organise their day or which activities or resources they must select to advance their learning. They work purposefully and diligently through the tasks set, asking for help when needed and contributing well to group sessions.

The provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Schemes of work cover all four aspects thoroughly. Group times and topic work ensure that pupils are introduced to a broad range of faiths and cultures, which is also evident among staff and pupils. This ensures that pupils' knowledge and understanding of the wider world is extended well. Regular opportunities are given for pupils to be reflective of their work or actions. They are able to articulate moral duties or dilemmas, putting forward their points of view sensibly. Paired and group working is popular and embedded as part of school life. Pupils are highly supportive of each other and understand the needs and differences of others exceedingly well. Pupils respond well to being given special responsibilities and are sensible as they go about their roles. Pupils' enjoyment of school and their feeling safe in school reflects in their very good attendance.

Quality of teaching

Adequate

The quality of teaching is adequate because it is too variable. This means that pupils' progress in lessons also varies considerably. The most effective sessions are those where staff have planned in detail which resources are needed and thought about the types of questions pupils might ask. They also plan for how the challenges will be adapted for the wide range of abilities within the group. Occasionally, the activities have not been thought about carefully enough for their learning value. Pupils' progress over time is not monitored carefully and consistently enough. While staff have identified in some pupils where progress has slowed or accelerated and the reasons for it, they are not doing enough to demonstrate that all pupils make consistently good progress overall.

As pupils work their way through their personal targets, which are identified in their journal, staff effectively facilitate and support learning individually, particularly in mathematics. More-able pupils' needs are generally well accounted for, including those who may be mathematically gifted and are working way above the expected National Curriculum level for their age. Here, work is set to extend learning further and to provide a greater level of challenge. Those pupils with additional needs are supported well and are thoroughly assessed in their progress towards their individual targets identified on their personal plans, but not so specifically in their progress in reading, writing and mathematics. Therefore, the school is unable to assess whether these pupils are making progress in line with others. The school has invested well in additional staff to hear pupils read very regularly. They also rely on Montessori resources to reinforce pupils' grasp of letters and their sounds. Some pupils who find reading difficult need further adult input to secure their knowledge of the sounds that letters make. Accurate formation of letter shapes is reinforced from an early age. As pupils move up the school, greater emphasis is given to adopting a neat handwriting style and a cursive script. Where pupils do follow through with their corrections and re-write illegible words and sentences accurately, they are making greater progress in their handwriting. However, this is not consistent with every pupil.

Quality of curriculum

Good

The quality of the curriculum is good as it is primarily based on pupils' needs and interests. The school offers a wide range of subjects, including French. The Montessori curriculum is successfully interwoven with the National Curriculum and the learning requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage. The quality of the curriculum in the Early Years Foundation Stage is good overall and meets all of the required areas of learning well. Children have free access to activities inside

and outside. There are appropriate adult directed activities and opportunities for self-initiated learning in both areas.

There is an excellent and popular range of extra-curricular activities, including choir and ukulele lessons. The school provides residential trips and regular excursions to places of interest. For example, pupils in Key Stage 2 went to the Paralympics in London in 2012 and have previously visited Tate Modern. Theatre trips reinforce a love of the spoken word and help develop pupils' interest in literature. Consequently, pupils enjoy their time in school and have an enthusiasm for learning. The school makes very good use of the outdoor environment and its proximity to fields and woodland. This suits those pupils who are active learners very well indeed and stimulates their inquisitive nature, understanding of the environment and team work. Resources for high achieving and older pupils are well chosen to ensure they continue to be challenged and enjoy their learning. There is a good range of books and newspapers which are age appropriate. The school makes exceptionally good use of information and communication technology to supplement learning across the whole subject range. Pupils thoroughly enjoy practical science experiments, deconstructing technology and comparing components. A rich physical education programme is provided by an external specialist sports coach. Healthy eating and lifestyles are well promoted through the Friday workshops.

Pupils' welfare, health and safety

Adequate

The provision for pupils' welfare, health and safety is adequate; all the independent school regulations are met. While there are no concerns for pupils' safety, the updating of policy documents has been slow to keep abreast of recent guidance and regulatory change. An up-to-date range of policy documents which meet current requirements is now in place and these are being implemented. The maintenance of essential risk assessments and logs is not as detailed as it could be in order to be thoroughly effective. Risk assessments are always completed prior to special on-site activities taking place or for off-site excursions, but not all potential risks have been thoroughly considered.

The school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils are rigorous and there are appropriate procedures in place for checking and recording the suitability of staff to work with children. The designated person for overseeing safeguarding arrangements has completed training at the required level and is very clear about procedures when there are concerns. Other staff are also suitably trained in child protection and are appropriately aware. Staff provide positive role models for pupils and promote the positive behaviour policy and anti-bullying procedures well. They respond sensitively to any concerns which the pupils may have. Staff are suitably trained in first aid, including paediatric first aid for those working with Nursery and Reception children. There have only been a very small number of minor accidents and incidents, which are recorded. Fire-fighting equipment and alarms are checked regularly by external contractors and monitored by senior staff, who also conduct regular emergency evacuations. The checking of the portable electrical appliances has been recently undertaken. The school has a suitable room to use should a child become ill.

Leadership and management

Adequate

Leadership and management are adequate. The school has maintained much of its good practice identified in its previous inspection. School leaders have ensured that all of the requirements for independent schools are met, including procedures for handling complaints, and there are no regulatory failures.

The premises and accommodation continue to be suitable and are well maintained. However, the proprietor has been too focused on day-to-day teaching commitments to be able to strategically take the school forward. There has been no accurate monitoring of teaching across the school and

no effective management of the performance of staff, who are currently not held to account for the progress of pupils. There is no procedure in place for identifying what is expected in every lesson and what needs improvement to ensure that all of the teaching at the school is at least good, and that it is making a positive impact on pupils' achievement and progress.

Senior leaders have acquired a tool to enable them to accurately track the pupils' Montessori achievements against the early learning goals in the Early Years Foundation Stage and the National Curriculum for those pupils in Years 1 to 6. However, they have not been sufficiently pro-active in setting up a suitable system to accurately monitor pupils' progress over time. There is a suitable system in place for reporting pupil's achievements and progress to parents and carers, but this is not systematically and regularly updated for all pupils. The website has not always been adequately updated with information and policies. Therefore, the quality of information is not as good as should be and some parents and carers are not receiving sufficient formal information about their child's progress in the main areas of learning. Parents and carers did not seem unduly concerned about this as they receive regular verbal feedback. In their questionnaire responses they said that this is a school they would recommend to others and their views were very favourable.

Leaders have invested in a range of training to help staff to be equipped for their roles and responsibilities. This is neither sufficiently linked to staff appraisal nor matched accurately to all of the school's needs, for example through an established cycle of monitoring teaching and whole-school self-evaluation. Staff are committed to improvement. However, there are no formal plans in place for school development.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	A school which provides an exceptional quality of education and significantly exceeds minimum requirements.
Grade 2	Good	A school which provides a high quality of education that exceeds minimum requirements.
Grade 3	Adequate	A school which meets minimum requirements but needs to improve the quality of education it provides.
Grade 4	Inadequate	A school where minimum requirements are not met and/or the quality of education has serious weaknesses.

School details

Unique reference number	135689
Inspection number	408737
DfE registration number	935/6226

This inspection was carried out 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.

Type of school	Primary
School status	Independent school
Age range of pupils	4.5–11 years
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	45
Number of part time pupils	2
Proprietor	Samantha Sims
Headteacher	Samantha Sims
Date of previous school inspection	24-25 November 2009
Annual fees (day pupils)	£4,800
Telephone number	01473 233782
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