

The Pier Head Preparatory Montessori School

3 Shadwell Pierhead, Glamis Road, Wapping, E1W 3TD

Inspection dates 24–26 February 2015

Overall effectiveness	Good	2
Leadership and management	Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	Good	2
Quality of teaching	Good	2
Achievement of pupils	Good	2
Early years provision	Good	2

Summary of key findings

This is a good school

- Senior leaders have worked very effectively to ensure that high standards of education are maintained. Pupils achieve well throughout the school.
- From pre-school upwards, teaching is mostly good and so pupils make good progress overall. Progress in reading is outstanding.
- The school provides a rich curriculum and a nurturing ethos that foster pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development extremely well. The curriculum gives pupils an all-round education and prepares them well for life in modern Britain.
- Throughout the school, staff promote the highest standards of behaviour and provide good day-to-day care. As a result, pupils feel safe and their behaviour is outstanding. They are enthusiastic learners and their attendance is high.
- The effectiveness of the early years provision is good. Children enjoy a wide range of interesting activities both indoors and outdoors.
- The proprietor has ensured that all the regulations for independent schools are met.
- Parents and carers are extremely positive about this school.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Staff do not regularly share the best teaching practice that exists in the school; they do not have access to a sufficiently wide range of training to further develop their skills.
- In Key Stage 1, teachers' marking does not show pupils exactly how to improve, particularly in writing and in mathematics.
- Senior leaders' checks on teaching do not always make full use of their scrutiny of pupils' work. Consequently, the feedback they give to staff is not always sufficiently incisive.
- Improvement plans are not always detailed enough to robustly monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of actions taken.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

- The school meets the schedule to The Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements.

Information about this inspection

- This inspection was carried out with one day's notice.
- The inspector observed six lessons or sessions led by adults, and observed play initiated by children in the pre-school, both indoors and outdoors. The inspector also heard pupils read. She observed playtimes and lunchtimes, as well as childcare arrangements in the mornings and evenings.
- The inspector scrutinised a wide range of documents including: safeguarding policies and procedures; teachers' plans and assessment records; the school's information on pupils' attainment and progress; schemes of work; pupils' work recorded in books, folders and photographs, and on displays; self-evaluation records; and documents relating to the management of teachers' performance.
- Meetings and discussions were held with the proprietor, headteacher, Early Years Foundation Stage manager and assessment coordinator, and with other staff. A meeting was also held with the director of the activity centre who is responsible for fire safety and some aspects of health and safety.
- The inspector took account of 14 responses to Parent View (Ofsted's online questionnaire) and held a meeting with one parent or carer. The views of pupils were sought informally during lunchtimes. The inspector also took account of the views expressed in five responses to the staff questionnaire.

Inspection team

Michèle Messaoudi, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The Pier Head Preparatory Montessori School is an independent day school that opened in 2009. It is registered to provide education for up to 45 boys and girls aged from two to seven years. The school is on the Early Years register. It is open five days a week from 8.00am to 6.00pm for 50 weeks of the year. Its childcare provision was inspected in December 2009 and in January 2013. The school had the first inspection of its education provision in September 2011. Since then, the school opened a mixed-age Key Stage 1 class in September 2013.
- The school is situated on the first floor of a community and activity centre in Wapping, in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets. It does not use any alternative provision. It makes use of the facilities of the activity centre, as well as of the adjacent tennis courts and park and a local swimming pool for physical education.
- There are currently 26 children on roll aged from two to seven years, of whom seven are in Key Stage 1. In the Early Years Foundation Stage, 18 children attend part time. There are three children of reception age. There are no pupils with a statement of special educational needs. Pupils have diverse cultural heritages. Most speak English as their mother tongue and two are bilingual. Pupils join the school at any time in the academic year. The proportion of pupils who join or leave the school in the same academic year is high.
- The proprietor of the school teaches full time at the school and is responsible for governance of the school. Until recently, she was also the headteacher. The structure of senior leadership is going through a transition period. A senior teacher, who was recruited in September 2014, took up the post of headteacher in January 2015. The Key Stage 1 class teacher coordinates the assessments of pupils' learning for the whole school. She is also the leader of the Early Years Foundation Stage. The proprietor, new headteacher and Key Stage 1 teacher form the senior leadership team. There are no middle managers. All other staff are known as 'pre-school' or 'lower-prep' teachers.
- The aim of the school is to 'educate the whole child and honour the diversity of each individual using the Montessori approach to education'.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise the quality of teaching from good to outstanding and so enable pupils to make outstanding progress by ensuring that staff:
 - share the best teaching practice that exists in the school more regularly; and have access to a wider range of training through links with local schools, including for the external moderation of their assessments
 - show Key Stage 1 pupils exactly how to further improve their work through written feedback, particularly in writing and mathematics; and give them time to respond to the marking.
- Strengthen the effectiveness of leadership and management and so enable pupils to achieve outstandingly well by:
 - carrying out more robust checks on teaching and learning; by linking observations of teaching more closely to analysis of pupils' work so that more incisive feedback can be given to staff
 - developing management plans that more clearly identify measures of success and specify who will check on the progress of actions and when, so that improvements can be better monitored and evaluated.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- Senior leaders and staff are highly effective in enacting the aims of the school. They create an extremely positive environment in which pupils thoroughly enjoy learning and achieve well.
- Staff work well together to promote the highest standards of behaviour and provide good day-to-day care. As a result, pupils feel safe and their behaviour is outstanding. Parents and carers greatly appreciate that their children love school, are safe and learn good manners.
- Senior leaders communicate high expectations of teaching and learning. The headteacher leads by example. The checks on teaching and learning are effective enough to ensure that most teaching is good. They are based on criteria that are closely aligned with the current Teachers' Standards. However, links between observations of teaching and analysis of pupils' work are not always robust enough to give incisive feedback to staff.
- Staff are very supportive of each other and eager to further develop their skills. However, the training they have received has been insufficient to raise the quality of teaching to outstanding. There are too few opportunities to share the best practice in the school. The school is seeking to forge links with local schools to widen the range of training provided for staff and senior leaders.
- The curriculum is broad, balanced and rich. It encourages in pupils a love of learning and it gives them an all-round education. It fosters their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development extremely well and prepares them well for life in modern Britain. Pupils benefit from specialist teaching in dance, drama, French, music, Spanish, swimming and climbing from the age of five years.
- The school implements effective strategies to ensure that pupils make rapid progress in speaking and reading, and good progress in writing and mathematics. The strong focus on literacy supports the language development of bilingual pupils well.
- Staff do everything they can to ensure that all pupils are treated equally and respectfully and no-one is discriminated against. This is reflected in a very positive ethos, equal access to the curriculum and good outcomes for all pupils. The staff take great care to represent the pupils' diverse backgrounds when talking about families and cultures, and celebrating festivals.
- All staff contribute to the school's evaluation of its performance, which is accurate and reviewed at monthly formal meetings. However, the improvement plans that follow from these meetings are not detailed enough because they lack the success criteria, and timescales required to secure outstanding provision
- Safeguarding arrangements meet current statutory requirements. Staff are properly vetted to ensure their suitability to work with children. All the necessary checks are recorded in a single central register. The policies and procedures aimed at keeping pupils safe are up to date and implemented consistently.
- Parents and carers receive the full range of information to which they are entitled. They express a high level of satisfaction with the school. They participate in widening pupils' social and cultural development, for example by coming into school to talk about their culture. The parent-teacher association actively supports the school by raising funds to build up resources.
- The school premises are maintained well and provide pleasant and safe teaching accommodation. The lack of storage space, which had put a strain on the organisation of documentation until recently, has been resolved by negotiating extra space with the landlord. The school uses the local facilities very effectively to enhance pupils' learning, particularly their physical development.
- **The governance of the school:**

The proprietor, who until recently was the headteacher of the school, knows the school well. She has ensured that all the regulations for independent schools, including safeguarding requirements, are met; and that the early years provision is good. Her decision to restructure the senior leadership demonstrates accurate identification of how best to redistribute responsibilities to sustain improvement.

The proprietor has a good understanding of the standards achieved by pupils, and of the strengths and weaknesses in teaching. Effective appraisals of staff enable the school to reward good teaching.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding throughout the school and contributes immensely to their learning. From the Nursery onwards, pupils' conduct reflects the consistency with which staff model and promote

the highest standards of behaviour. Pupils are exceptionally eager to learn and do so with great concentration until they complete their activities. They actively participate in discussion. They present their work mostly well. Pupils' attendance is good.

- Pupils say that they love everything about their school, especially the teachers. Parents and carers are unanimous in saying that their children are happy at school.
- Pupils develop very high levels of self-esteem and self-confidence through the nurturing ethos of the school, the teaching and the curriculum. They develop excellent communication skills through drama.
- Pupils demonstrate excellent social skills. They play and work harmoniously with pupils of different cultural backgrounds from their own. They are well mannered, considerate and friendly. Pupils fulfil their responsibilities, such as pouring water for others at lunchtime and tidying up, with great care.
- Pupils' awareness of diverse cultures and beliefs is promoted actively through a wide range of first-hand experiences. For example, they have learnt about Diwali, Eid, Chinese New Year and Saint David's Day directly from visitors to the school.
- Pupils gain a basic understanding of British democratic values by contributing to school rules and adhering to them. They develop a growing knowledge of public institutions through the 'people who help us' topic, supplemented by visits to the park, swimming pool, library and museums. Visits from the fire brigade, a doctor, a dental hygienist and an architect have brought to life 'what some special people do' to keep us safe and healthy. They have participated in a local restoration project.

Safety

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good throughout the school. All the Independent School Standards that relate to safeguarding and safety, and the welfare requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage are met. The school has made a good start in standardising the filing of documents relating to safety so that they are more readily accessible. Staff supervise pupils well throughout the day, including during the extended childcare provision.
- Security is good and arrangements for the safe arrival and collection of pupils are rigorous. Risks are properly assessed for on-site and off-site activities. All staff are trained in first aid and child protection to appropriate standards. Parents and carers have full confidence in the school's ability to keep their children safe.
- Pupils say that they feel safe. They understand what constitutes bullying and feel free from any form of harassment. They learn how to keep safe in case of fire, when using the swimming pool, crossing the road and climbing. They also learn about e-safety and know that they must not talk to strangers and enter chat rooms when using the internet. Throughout the school, pupils show that they know how to move about and use equipment safely. They demonstrate good hygiene practices.

The quality of teaching

is good

- Teaching is mostly good throughout the school and enables pupils to make good progress. All the Independent School Standards that relate to the quality of teaching and assessment are met.
- The teaching of reading is of consistently high quality and staff instil in pupils a love of reading. A consistent programme of phonics (the sounds that letters make) enables pupils to progress rapidly in their reading skills.
- The teaching of writing is good. In pre-school, staff teach children to form their letters correctly and to use their phonics skills to help spell accurately. In Key Stage 1, teachers help pupils to develop their ideas and use interesting words through effective questioning and verbal feedback. However, while the marking of completed work is encouraging, it does not show pupils exactly how to improve their work.
- The teaching of mathematics is good throughout the school. There is a strong emphasis on number bonds and solving problems, supported by appropriate resources that include Montessori mathematical equipment. In Key Stage 1, pupils are encouraged to explain verbally how they arrived at an answer. However, as with writing, the marking of their work does not extend their thinking and so they do not consistently develop reasoning and checking skills.
- Teachers have good knowledge of the curriculum and of the subjects they teach. This enables them to challenge pupils well. They often make links between different subject areas, which enables pupils to apply their skills and knowledge in different contexts.
- Teachers know pupils well and most teachers have very high expectations of what pupils can achieve. Staff generally plan tasks that stretch all pupils sufficiently to enable them to make good progress. The most effective teaching is characterised by searching questioning and highly challenging activities. In these cases, pupils are engrossed in their learning and excel. In most lessons, teachers engage pupils through questions and answers and give them time to rehearse their ideas. This supports bilingual pupils well.

- Occasionally, the pace of pupils' learning drops when they are not given the resources they need to undertake a task, or when staff do not engage them sufficiently in discussion.
- Assessments of pupils' progress are collated effectively and this information is analysed to give staff a clear picture of pupils' attainment and progress. Teaching is then adjusted accordingly so that pupils can make good progress. However, teachers do not always assess pupils' work frequently enough to make more timely adjustments that would accelerate pupils' progress.
- In Key Stage 1, teachers' assessments are checked internally but not externally to verify their accuracy. In pre-school, they are moderated both internally and externally.

The achievement of pupils

is good

- Pupils achieve well throughout the school as a result of good teaching and an interesting and rich curriculum. The Independent School Standards that relate to pupils' achievement are met. There are no significant differences in the achievement of boys and girls or any other group of pupils, including those who are bilingual.
- Children join pre-school with starting points that are typically variable. They make good progress overall throughout pre-school and make excellent progress in reading. In 2014, the very few children who were of reception age all achieved a good level of development. These children were well prepared for Year 1. The children who are currently in Reception are on track to achieve or exceed the expected goals.
- In Key Stage 1, pupils have made outstanding progress in reading since joining the school. They have made good progress overall in writing, mathematics and science. Their standards are generally above or well above expectations in these subjects. However, their writing skills and their ability to reason in mathematics are not developed as well as they could be; in part this is because they are not challenged to improve in these respects by teachers' marking.
- Key Stage 1 pupils apply their mathematical skills well in other subjects. For example in geography, they made a map of their house; and when participating in a restoration project of ancient steps leading to the Thames, they measured the stairs and recorded the materials. They also apply their skills well in literacy and information and communication technology, for example in the production of a newsletter. They and reception children have produced high-quality art using a variety of media.
- The more able pupils are highly motivated to excel. The most able Year 1 pupils can write at length using interesting words in a variety of contexts and they enjoy writing non-fiction books, based on their own reading. For example, they achieved well when writing a clear scientific explanation of day and night.

The early years provision

is good

- Excellent communication between pre-school teachers, the senior leaders and families has improved children's school readiness. Parents and carers supply valuable information about their children before they join. They are very positive about arrangements for settling children and feel well informed of their children's learning and development. Those children aged four and above who show aptitude for more formal work are taught in the Key Stage 1 class, which prepares them well for Year 1.
- The leadership of the Early Years Foundation Stage is good. All the statutory requirements related to children's welfare, health, safety, learning and personal development are met. Teaching is mostly good as a result of effective monitoring and training and so children achieve well. However the outstanding practice that exists is not shared regularly enough between all teachers.
- Staff have an accurate view of the strengths and weaknesses of the pre-school and make concerted decisions about further improvements. However, their improvement plans are not always detailed enough to help them check the effectiveness of their action.
- Teachers plan exciting activities that take into account children's interests, both indoors and outdoors. They develop children's reasoning and language skills consistently by engaging them in conversation. This supports bilingual children particularly well. Teachers are skilful at extending children's learning at the right time.
- Most staff use resources very effectively to encourage children to think about and explore their environment. For example, a group of children investigated the size, weight and texture of ice cubes melting in shaving foam. They observed the changes and gained an awareness of cause and effect. However, on occasion, worksheets are not well matched the varying needs of some children.
- Teachers assess children's learning accurately to track their progress and plan activities that support them in reaching the next steps of their development. However, these assessments are not always frequent enough to make more timely planning adjustments and help children achieve their next steps sooner.
- Children behave extremely well. They settle very promptly into the school's daily routines and get on very well together. They are proud of their achievements in early reading and writing and they enjoy counting.

They feel safe in school and are very happy.

What inspection judgements mean

School	
Grade	Judgement
Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Requires improvement
Grade 4	Inadequate

Detailed grade characteristics can be viewed in the *Non-association independent school inspection handbook* which is published on the Ofsted website: www.gov.uk/government/publications/non-association-independent-school-inspection-handbook.

School details

Unique reference number	136250
Inspection number	454294
DfE registration number	211/136250

This inspection was carried out under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008, 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	Montessori pre-preparatory and preparatory school
School status	Independent
Age range of pupils	2–7
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	26
Number of part time pupils	18
Proprietor	Emma Kohl
Headteacher	Julie McCormick
Date of previous school inspection	September 2011
Annual fees (day pupils)	£4,185 (part time) to £7,485 (full time)
Telephone number	020 7481 0202
Email address	thepierheadlowerprep@yahoo.co.uk

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