

The Meadows Montessori School

32 Larchcroft Road, Ipswich, Suffolk, IP1 6AR

Inspection dates

13–15 September 2016

Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Outstanding
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Early years provision	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Adequate

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The headteacher has created a nurturing culture that enables pupils to thrive academically, socially and emotionally. She leads by example. Parents are overwhelmingly positive about her dedication to make the school the best it can be.
- Pupils' behaviour is exemplary. Their personal development is outstanding. Relationships are strong between pupils and between pupils and their teachers. Pupils are extremely well prepared to move on to their high schools.
- Pupils make rapid progress in English and mathematics. An above-average proportion reach standards that are better than those expected for their age. Pupils' reading, speaking and writing skills are particularly strong.
- The move to new premises was managed well and the school is much improved. Teaching, learning and assessment are now good. Staff ensure that pupils have all the guidance and materials they need to make good progress.
- The rich and unique curriculum enables pupils to develop as mature learners. Pupils have a secure understanding of their community and of the wider world in which they live. They apply their knowledge of what it means to be a good citizen in modern Britain very well.
- The youngest children are well cared for. They adapt quickly to the school's routines. They are very happy, keen to discover new things and eager to learn. The way older pupils look after younger ones is a pleasure to see.
- The caring staff closely support the needs of all pupils and promote their well-being very effectively. Staff know pupils well and skilfully help those who are experiencing emotional difficulties and particular challenges in their lives.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress across all year groups because teachers and teaching assistants work well together to support their learning.
- The school is not yet outstanding. Leaders have not checked closely enough the quality of the cultural curriculum. Pupils do not do as well as they should in all subjects.
- Reports to parents are not sufficiently comprehensive.
- Subject leads for English and mathematics are new to their role. The way they check the impact of teaching on pupils' outcomes across subjects requires some consolidation.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

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

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Evaluate the quality of the subjects taught as part of the cultural curriculum so that:
 - pupils achieve as highly in these areas as they do in English and mathematics
 - parents are better informed about their children's progress across all subjects.

- Develop the skills of subject leaders so that:
 - they check more precisely the quality of teaching and learning
 - they ensure that literacy and numeracy skills are applied well across the curriculum.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- In September 2013 the school moved to larger premises to meet parental demand and make provision for more school places. With the support of parents, the headteacher managed this enormous amount of work very effectively. The current accommodation meets the needs of pupils and staff very well. The headteacher diligently ensures that all the independent school standards and safety requirements are met.
- The headteacher's leadership has improved significantly. After the previous inspection she introduced tighter checks on the quality of teaching and a better system to assess pupils' progress. As a result, teaching and outcomes are now good. The new assessment process is used effectively in English and mathematics and provides a more accurate picture of pupils' progress in these subjects.
- The headteacher has created a strong team of committed professionals to help her fulfil her vision and make the school the best it can be, centred on nurturing pupils' academic, social and emotional skills. She has gained the full trust and admiration of parents. The inspector agrees with parents who said that the effective work of the business manager enables the headteacher to lead teaching and learning and not just manage the school.
- A rich and unique curriculum allows pupils to explore their talents, learn about a broad range of topics and make good progress. The focus on English and mathematics in the mornings, on the cultural curriculum in the afternoons and the special activities held weekly on Fridays enable pupils to develop their skills effectively.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted very effectively. The strong personal, social, health and economic education programme enables pupils to consider the society within which they live and develop a secure understanding of the different cultures in modern Britain. There are many enrichment opportunities for pupils, who often take part in artistic and musical events. Pupils perform an annual play 'musical in a week', with all but the youngest pupils taking part. Some pupils went to the O2 arena in London to perform in a music festival with other schools. In the spring term the Friday curriculum, through its focus on exploring different faiths, helps pupils understand about how faiths differ and how they are also similar.
- Many parents said that they had chosen this school because of its effective provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. This aspect of the school's work is well managed. Teaching assistants are well deployed to ensure that pupils access and learn in all areas of the curriculum.
- The headteacher models her expectations of her staff and of the pupils very well. She has an accurate view of teachers' strengths and where they could improve the quality of teaching and learning. Her visits to lessons, frequent conversations with staff and formal performance reviews provide good opportunities to identify staff's training needs. Teachers' performance targets, however, do not focus clearly enough on raising standards that are part of the cultural curriculum.
- The appointment of subject leaders for English and mathematics is recent and the leadership of these subjects is not as effective as it should be. Leaders have not evaluated the quality of teaching in sufficient depth or ensured that literacy and numeracy skills are used well across subjects. Although assessment is now used to plan learning in

English and mathematics, it is at times too cautious and does not match the high level of knowledge and skills that pupils bring to their studies.

- The good leadership of early years means that children settle very quickly at school. The leader in charge is knowledgeable about the requirements of the early years foundation stage. Her communication with parents is prompt and reassuring. Most of the outdoor area is of a high quality, particularly the garden. The headteacher acknowledges that the corridor-style approach to the Reception/Year 1 classroom requires refurbishment to make this area more welcoming and to support children's learning further.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Staff demonstrate very clearly that it is everyone's responsibly to create a safe culture in the school. A comprehensive safeguarding policy is published on the school's website and meets current government requirements.
- All staff have received training relating to keeping children safe, including online safety. The frequent updates to staff mean that all have a clear understanding of what actions they must take where they have safeguarding concerns about a pupil. Where safeguarding concerns do arise, the school works closely with the local authority and relevant agencies to support the pupils concerned.
- The headteacher has undertaken all relevant training and has ensured that staff are aware of the signs of extremism and radicalisation. Staff understand how to report any concerns they may have should any pupil express extremist or radicalised points of view.
- The school reminds parents of their responsibilities regarding keeping their children safe. The destination of any pupil leaving within the school year or at the end of Year 6 is checked. The headteacher promptly contacts the local authority where parents appear not to have enrolled their child at a new school or to have withdrawn their child to educate them at home.
- At its previous inspection, the school was asked to improve risk assessments prior to visits and practical activities. This has been done and current risk assessments are thorough.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- The quality of teaching, including in the early years, is good. Pupils' excellent behaviour, their appetite for learning and the positive relationships between pupils and their teachers provide the right context for good achievement in the classroom. In English and mathematics, the pride with which pupils complete their work and their eagerness to learn lead to rapid progress.
- Teachers manage the mixed-age classes effectively. Younger pupils learn from older ones. Pupils listen carefully to the ideas of others and work well together.
- Teachers use an assessment system that enables them to check pupils' understanding in English and mathematics. They use the information gleaned from assessment to plan activities that enable pupils to catch up if they fall behind, or to extend their understanding further where they are already secure. Teachers also work with other schools to moderate their assessment and share good practice, for example, through the teachers' writing group, and also through the community of Montessori schools.
- In the early years, assessment of children's learning is frequent and used well to plan the next steps for their progress. Speaking and listening skills are taught well. Staff guide

children skilfully when they use equipment, such as rulers when measuring or predicting what will happen to a flow of water going through a series of pipes. Often the resources lead to great excitement and very good scientific discovery, such as realising how chalk changes colour when dropped in water.

- The way teaching is organised suits most-able pupils very well. The right combination between the uninterrupted flow of the morning sessions, the clear guidance, the discreet staff supervision and the excellent attitudes of pupils leads to accelerated progress. Pupils are given sufficient time to complete their research and are skilled at finding things out for themselves. Teachers make sure that the range of resources matches pupils' needs. The practical resources, used in mathematics, for example, deepen pupils' understanding and enable the most able mathematicians to solve increasingly complex problems.
- Pupils usually make full use of learning time. In the classroom, they move without fuss from one activity to the next. In the afternoon sessions, teachers do not sufficiently exploit the enthusiasm and ability of the most able pupils. Although pupils still do very well because they are self-motivated, some could do even better if activities were better matched to their high level of knowledge.
- Reading and writing are strengths of the school. Teachers regularly encourage pupils to read, either from their own work or from their reading books. Those pupils who read to the inspector did so fluently, with excellent diction and tone. They demonstrated secure comprehension of what they had read. The most able readers read for pleasure frequently at school and at home. They said that the library had exciting books. Most-able pupils are well equipped to select the information they need from complex sources such as dictionaries, reference materials and the internet.
- Teachers and teaching assistants support pupils who have special educational needs or disability effectively. Several parents said that, since moving to this school, their children's specific needs had been identified promptly and have been met. The individual support for weaker readers and the frequent opportunities they have to read with an adult help them gain in confidence and accuracy. The reading and spelling logs and close partnership with parents contribute to the good progress of less confident readers and writers.
- The positive developments in assessing pupils' work in English and mathematics are not applied well enough to subjects in the cultural curriculum. Although teachers know their pupils well, assessment of subjects taught in the afternoon sessions is not specific enough. This means that work is at times too easy and learning slows. A few parents said that they would like to know more about their children's progress. This inspection confirms that assessment information and reports to parents lack detail in key areas of learning such as in artistic, scientific and technological education.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Outstanding

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- The school is highly effective in promoting personal development and welfare. The school's rule to 'treat everyone with respect' is maintained by all who come to The Meadows. Pupils spoke to the inspector about tolerance and acceptance of everyone, including people from different backgrounds and faiths, and those who have disabilities.

Pupils develop as very mature young people, their understanding of discrimination and fairness is exemplary.

- Pupils are confident, very articulate and immensely proud of their school. They like the many opportunities they are given to be independent. This is taught as soon as pupils join the school. Children in the early years class are encouraged to choose their resources and activities, and to put things away when finished. As pupils progress through the school they continue to choose their activities from a broad and carefully chosen selection, and decide in which order they will tackle tasks. This leads to pupils developing into industrious and independent young people who know how to organise their work and learn well without supervision.
- Pupils demonstrate care for themselves and for their wider community. Older pupils enjoy taking on responsibilities such as playground buddies. The Friday curriculum provides pupils with opportunities to work on the school's allotment and so learn about the environment. Pupils explore concepts such as fair trade. They discuss what being in a community means in practice, carrying out activities such as preparing a community lunch.
- Pupils say that the school is a safe place and that there is always someone to talk to if they have any concerns. Parents agree that the school is a safe environment for their children.
- Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of education. Some parents of pupils who left the school at the end of Year 6 told the inspector that their older children had settled quickly into high school, many of them being placed into top sets because of their above-average knowledge and good skills. The school receives regular similar positive feedback from high schools.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding.
- Pupils behave exceptionally well in lessons and around the school. They are polite and courteous towards adults, for example, greeting visitors they meet in the corridors. This is because staff expectations are clear. Staff provide excellent role models in the way they treat pupils, parents and each other.
- Pupils listen to each other and cooperate, sharing resources and supporting each other in their learning. At play-times older and younger pupils play together enjoying the opportunities that this brings. Older pupils say that they enjoy caring for the younger children, and younger pupils are not worried about joining older pupils for work or play.
- The very small number of pupils who have difficulties with their behaviour are supported very well so that learning is not disturbed. An atmosphere of tranquillity prevails. A number of parents spoken to during the inspection were particularly positive about the very calm start to each school day, with pupils coming to school and settling straightaway to their morning learning tasks.
- Pupils say that bullying is extremely rare and that any incidents are dealt with quickly by staff. Parents who responded to Parent View, the Ofsted inspection questionnaire, agreed that this was the case. The weekly class meetings enable pupils to raise any concerns and also to develop strategies for resolving problems themselves. The school phrase for these meetings, 'solution not blame', sets out clearly what is expected from pupils. Each class also has a 'peace table' where pupils are encouraged to resolve any minor problems themselves, with adult mediation only if necessary.
- Pupils enjoy coming to school, and attendance is currently above average. Punctuality is

also good. Last year's attendance was lower due to a bout of illness and some pupils taking term-time holidays to match the holiday dates of older siblings attending private schools. The headteacher diligently checks the impact of low attendance on achievement.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Outcomes for pupils are good, especially in English and mathematics. Pupils enter the school with standards that are at least as expected for their age. Staff work hard to ensure that pupils who lack confidence overcome any barriers to learning and that those who are most able make accelerated progress. Pupils' outstanding personal development contributes to their good outcomes.
- The school's performance information, such as pupils' reading ages and reports from older pupils who are now in high schools, indicate that pupils make rapid progress from their starting points. They quickly progress to levels of understanding that are mostly above the expectations for their age in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Pupils are well prepared for further studies. The small size of the school does not hold them back when they move to high school. The way pupils decide for themselves how to organise their work develops their study skills. Many pupils spoken to had high aspirations. They were very clear about what their future career might entail and how they would get there.
- The school's performance information and evidence from pupils' journals and past work show that the most-able pupils make good progress in their reading, writing and mathematics. In these subjects, pupils seek help where they require it and they check that the work they are doing is challenging enough. They use highly sophisticated vocabulary to express feelings and emotions in their imaginative extended writing. However, in some afternoon sessions, pupils underachieve when the work is not pitched at the right level or when the resources they are asked to complete limit their creativity, such as when completing worksheets.
- Pupils do well in drama, French and music because of their well-developed speaking and listening skills. Effective communication is given high profile. All pupils, regardless of ability, are often required to express their own opinions and practise their public speaking, such as during the school play. They do this well. Pupils keep active and are physically fit. They were observed applying the skills learnt in physical education very well at lunchtime, such as when passing the ball in football, running and dribbling.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress in developing their knowledge and skills as well as in their confidence as learners. This is due to the effective support and high level of care that pupils receive from teachers and teaching assistants. Pupils were proud to read with the inspector, and they showed that they understood good techniques to help comprehension and decipher unknown words.
- The youngest children make good progress in the early years/Year 1 class. The current children had only been in school for two weeks at the time of the inspection. They are very settled and know where to find the things they need to learn and play.

Early years provision

Good

- From a very young age, children are guided well towards the school's Montessori ethos and approach to learning. Children enter the early years provision with starting points that are broadly typical of their age. They make good progress in all areas of learning so that the proportion attaining a good level of development by the end of the Reception year is above the national average. Children are well prepared to move on to Year 1.
- The teacher in charge of early years is taking effective action to improve the quality of teaching further. Staff know the children well and, with the help of teaching assistants, they assess carefully children's starting points in reading, writing and mathematics so that learning can progress swiftly.
- Activities, both indoors and outdoors, are interesting, challenging and accessible to all. A strong emphasis on developing children's use of speech means that pupils communicate effectively with their friends and adults.
- The carefully-considered activities help children understand the core values of the school. The precise daily routines and safe behaviour contribute to children's excellent personal development. Visits to places of interest and extra-curricular provision such as the school's allotment strengthen this further.
- The views of parents are taken into account when leaders and teachers plan improvements. The parents who spoke to the inspector appreciate the many opportunities they have to express their views and value the information they receive about their children's learning and development.
- Provision is not outstanding because elements of child-initiated play are not assessed well enough. Teaching is not yet outstanding and part of the outdoor area requires some refurbishment to make it a more exciting space in which to learn and play.

School details

Unique reference number	135689
DfE registration number	935/6226
Inspection number	10008596

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 Primary
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	4 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	57
Number of part-time pupils	2
Proprietor	Mrs Samantha Sims
Headteacher	Mrs Samantha Sims
Annual fees (day pupils)	£6,000
Telephone number	01473233782
Website	www.themeadowsmontessori.com
Email address	info@themeadowsmontessori.com
Date of previous inspection	4–6 March 2013

Information about this school

- The Meadows is an independent day school. It opened in September 2008. Over the past four years, the school has grown in size. It moved to its current premises in Larchcroft Road in September 2013. About half the staff were not at the school at the time of the previous inspection that took place in March 2013.
- The headteacher is the sole proprietor. The school does not have a governing body.
- The school is registered for 75 pupils between the ages of three and a half and 11 years. It usually admits children from the age of four. The number of children who are currently in the early years foundation stage is very low.
- There are currently 57 pupils on roll. A very small number of pupils speak English as an additional language. A few pupils have been identified as having 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. Pupils learn at their own pace. The curriculum is designed to nurture independence and self-confidence. The school provides an extended school day with before- and after-school care.
- There are four classrooms: one for Reception and Year 1 pupils, two for Years 2, 3 and 4, and one for Years 5 and 6.
- All pupils are off timetable on Fridays. They work in cross-age teams and undertake woodland activities, drama and singing, healthy-living sessions including exercise and human biology, art and craft.
- The headteacher owns Willow Park Montessori Day Nursery. This nursery is not on the school's site. It was inspected separately in June 2016 and judged to be outstanding

Information about this inspection

- This inspection was carried out with a day's notice.
- The inspector visited all classes and observed staff teaching or supporting pupils.
- The inspector looked at a wide range of pupils' work, including their journals, their individual achievement folders and photographic evidence. The inspector heard many pupils read and observed other pupils being heard reading.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, the special educational needs coordinator, and the lead teachers for English, mathematics and early years. Staff completed 12 questionnaires.
- Pupils were spoken to throughout the inspection to check on their views.
- The inspector met parents at the beginning of the school day and took account of the views expressed in 39 responses from parents on Parent View. The school's own parental survey, conducted in summer 2016, was also considered. The inspector received 35 additional comments from parents.
- 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. The school's compliance with the regulations for independent schools was checked.

Inspection team

Marianick Ellender-Gelé, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

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