

Soaring High Montessori School

Purley Farm, Colne Road, Coggeshall, Essex CO6 1TH

Inspection dates

18–20 January 2017

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| 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 | Good |

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The school's leaders have maintained the good standard of education achieved at the time of the previous inspection.
- The school's small size enables pupils to be known as individuals, who are exceptionally well cared for.
- Pupils make good progress at the school because they experience effective teaching on a daily basis.
- Teachers make good use of the specialist materials which are characteristic of this school.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities achieve good outcomes.
- Pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school is exemplary. They are respectful of their teachers and of each other.
- Pupils' attendance is in line with the national average.
- The good curriculum is enhanced through a wide range of clubs and activities, in which pupils enjoy participating.
- The early years provision is good. Children work co-operatively with one another, and parents are kept well informed of their children's progress.
- Occasionally, the most able pupils do not make as rapid progress as they might do. This is sometimes due to the quality of teachers' questioning.
- The presentation of a few pupils' work in books could be neater.
- Systems to track the progress of all pupils are at an early stage of development.
- Links between the school's systems for evaluating its own effectiveness and how this informs school improvement planning could be tighter than they are at present.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

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

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Secure outstanding outcomes and consistently strong teaching by:
 - ensuring that the school's most able pupils make consistently strong progress
 - making sure that teachers' use of questioning is pitched at an appropriate level in order to stretch and challenge all pupils in the school
 - ensuring that pupils' presentation of their work in books is of a consistently high standard.
- Strengthen leadership and management by:
 - refining the systems for evaluating the effectiveness of the school so that these link more closely to school improvement planning
 - establishing and making smart use of the newly-introduced electronic system for tracking pupils' progress so that leaders and teachers are able to support more pupils in achieving outstanding outcomes.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The principal has a clear vision for this school which is known and understood by staff, pupils and parents. Parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, are very supportive of what the school aims to achieve.
- One parent commented, 'I cannot stress enough what care and attention is invested by every single member of staff in educating and caring for my children. We feel very lucky that our children are being given this incredible start to their education.'
- The principal, who is also the sole proprietor, has ensured that pupils achieve good outcomes due to the effective teaching they experience. Pupils' safety and their well-being are also paramount.
- The school's improvement plan is a well-considered document which correctly identifies the key priorities for the school. Leaders regularly monitor progress made against the identified action in the plan. Evidence gathered during this inspection demonstrates that leaders' actions have had a positive impact in addressing the areas for improvement identified during the previous inspection in February 2012.
- Evidence gathered during the inspection demonstrates that the school's leaders ensure compliance with all of the independent school standards.
- Communication between the school and parents is regular and informative. Parents receive detailed reports on how well their children are doing in school and the principal makes herself available to speak to parents at the start and the end of each school day.
- The management of teaching is effective. Teachers are observed regularly in the classroom and effective support is provided to help them develop their practice. The principal identifies teachers' strengths and weaknesses and ensures that appropriate professional development opportunities are made available, either in school or through external providers.
- The curriculum is broad and balanced and is supplemented by a range of extra-curricular activities and clubs. Pupils learn French, which is taught by a specialist native speaker. Musical activities also feature regularly and take-up is popular among the pupils at the school.
- The school promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well. Pupils work well in groups, as well as individually, and they willingly support each other when their peers find an aspect of their work challenging. They have a good understanding of fundamental British values, and are well prepared for living in a modern democratic Britain. Pupils have to apply for posts of responsibility and go through a hustings process where they present their strengths to their peers. They have a thorough understanding of the democratic process. Weekly subscriptions to a newspaper, which is geared towards younger readers, provokes debates on topical issues, such as 'Brexit' and the recent presidential election in the USA.
- The school's self-evaluation document is currently more a list of actions taken or to be taken, rather than an evaluation of the effectiveness of the provision. This approach does not routinely inform school improvement planning.

Governance

- The arrangements for governance are met through the role of the proprietor. Hence, as the proprietor and the principal are one and the same person, the proprietor is well informed of the issues facing the school. The proprietor reviews the school policies regularly to ensure that they are kept up to date.
- The proprietor has ensured that the school has published a suitable safeguarding policy on its website.
- Any administrative flaws found in the school's single central record of recruitment checks were rectified immediately under the strict supervision of the proprietor.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- The school is committed to keeping pupils safe. All staff have received up-to-date training in safeguarding children. Leaders have ensured that all staff have received and read the latest guidance on safeguarding, 'Keeping children safe in education' (2016).
- Staff have also been provided with up-to-date training on the government's 'Prevent' duty, which aims to prevent young people from being drawn into terrorist activity or becoming the victims of radicalisation.
- Child protection documents are now very well maintained as a result of an emergency inspection conducted in January 2014.
- Arrangements for signing in visitors to the school are robust and the school site is safe and secure. The school's single central record of recruitment checks of staff meets statutory requirements.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teaching meets the needs of pupils well. Teachers adhere to the Montessori methodology, which is a school requirement, and have high expectations of what they expect mixed-age pupils in their class to achieve. Having more than one teacher in each class has a positive impact on pupils' learning, as they plan for learning collaboratively and clearly complement each other's skills well.
- Teachers incorporate the teaching of literacy and numeracy in their planning, and ensure that these skills are developed at a pace which is appropriate for the pupils in their class. Older pupils take on the responsibility for what they will learn during the week, and set their own learning goals. However, their teachers maintain a clear oversight of pupils' learning plans to ensure that learning activities are appropriate.
- This flexible approach means that pupils are not inhibited by aspects of the curriculum they may find difficult. For example, pupils who find spelling and sentence construction challenging are encouraged to write. These pupils enjoy writing at length, being allowed to concentrate on composition and narrative content, rather than being concerned about the areas they find challenging. As a result, pupils enjoy learning and have confidence within their learning and achievement.
- Pupils are encouraged to explore their understanding of mathematical knowledge. Pupils from Reception Year to Year 6 use a range of resources to test out their ideas and secure

their understanding. Pupils independently select resources to help them write imaginative stories and construct sentences correctly. This demonstrates a high degree of confidence and independence when learning key aspects of mathematics and English.

- Reading is taught well in lessons and pupils are actively encouraged to read by their teachers. The inspector listened to readers from Reception Year and Year 6. The most able readers read with great fluency and expression, and the weaker readers make effective use of their phonics skills. Pupils choose books which are appropriate for their age, and many demonstrate their love of reading by reading fiction books at home.
- Teachers assess pupils' progress well by recording progress in their work books or by providing pupils with useful written or verbal feedback.
- Leaders acknowledge the need to gain a whole-school overview of how well different groups of pupils achieve. A new electronic system is currently being piloted, and plans are in place for this to be rolled out across the whole school shortly.
- Occasionally, teaching does not provide a high enough degree of challenge for some of the school's most able pupils. This means that these pupils do not always make rapid and sustained progress. When most-able pupils select their own tasks, they typically select tasks at a suitable level. When teachers become directly involved in teaching a mixed-ability group, it is then that the most able pupils are not always challenged enough.
- While teachers' questioning is typically effective in testing pupils' understanding of what they are learning, sometimes questions fail to challenge some of the most able pupils sufficiently, to enable them to deepen their knowledge and understanding.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Outstanding

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding. The strong element of independent learning with a child-centred approach, promoted within the school's curriculum, is evidenced in lessons. Pupils respect each other and experience good relationships with adults during teaching and learning. Pupils' diaries show that teachers monitor pupils' outcomes closely and ensure that individuals meet their targets. Pupils told the inspector that they enjoy the freedom and the independence and they enjoy being in control of their own learning.
- Pupils have a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe. Pupils told the inspector that they feel 'very safe' in school and believe they are well supervised at breaktimes. The inspector observed a high staff presence when pupils were at play.
- Pupils can talk about internet safety and the dangers associated with social networking sites as well as the positive features of information and communications technology. The school's commitment to ensuring that pupils' safety is further supported by parents, who commented positively on Parent View and when speaking to the inspector on the playground regarding the safety of their children.
- Pupils are able to describe the different types of bullying, however, they say bullying 'does not really happen'. There are no incidents of bullying recorded in the school's log for this school year. Pupils told inspectors that they are confident that if there were any incidents in school adults would deal with them effectively.

- Pupils are confident and are encouraged to do their best in an extremely supportive environment. Small cohorts and mixed-age groups allow a fluid approach in lessons, where pupils of different ages and abilities interact well across a range of activities. Consequently, pupils develop and maintain strong relationships across the school.
- Pupils enjoy responsibilities such as being head of house or taking on the role of library monitor. Pupils consider the responsibilities a privilege. They take these roles very seriously and are required to deliver a presentation demonstrating why they should be given the responsibility before being voted into their post. Consequently, pupils feel they are strongly involved in school life at many levels.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding. The schools' positive behaviour ethos is embedded within the school's 'positive behaviour' policy and throughout the school. The school provides tools and strategies which help pupils reflect on their behaviour. For example, the school's 'peace table' encourages pupils to consider, through discussion, how best to resolve friendship issues. One pupil said, 'We can usually sort out things ourselves.' Staff and parents overwhelmingly believe that behaviour is good. The inspector did not see any disruptive or inappropriate behaviour during the inspection.
- Pupils have an enthusiasm for learning. Pupils are happy and motivated in lessons and are keen to share their work with adults. Pupils are able to talk about what helps them to learn and how they can improve.
- Pupils are polite and respectful. They hold doors open for adults and each other. They move around the school building sensibly and different age groups play well together during breaktimes. Pupils are courteous and thoughtful when answering questions.
- Pupils are happy to talk about school life and are extremely positive about what the school provides for them. When asked what the school could do to improve, one pupil said, 'I think the school is already perfect.'
- Attendance is broadly in line with the national average and is on an upward trend. There have been no fixed-term exclusions this academic year.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Pupils make good progress over time from their different starting points. This is because most teaching is very well planned and takes account of pupils' prior attainment.
- Although pupils in Year 6 do not sit national tests, the school's own assessments show that over a third of pupils exceeded national expectations for progress in reading, writing and mathematics in 2016.
- The inspector's scrutiny of pupils' books demonstrates a good level of progress across all year groups and across a wide range of subjects.
- The 'great lesson' format, which is a topic-based approach delivered six times over the school year, is effective in securing good outcomes because it pulls together a range of themes and subjects. This allows pupils to develop skills in a way which is appropriate for their individual needs. For example, 'The coming of man' topic ensures that effective progress is made in science, English, reading and writing, through carefully chosen tasks which sustain pupils' interest.

- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress, because their learning is carefully structured to consolidate previously acquired knowledge. They are also helped to practise and develop skills which have been identified as in need of improvement. Teachers understand their needs well and adapt the tasks so they can access the learning as well as their peers.
- Case studies of pupils who have dyslexia demonstrate that the support they are given is well targeted and enables them to make good progress, particularly in writing.
- Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their educational career and adapt well to life in secondary school.
- The school's most able pupils make good progress because they typically select tasks which are pitched at an appropriate level of difficulty, and work on these at their own pace. Occasionally, their learning is not as effective because teachers' questioning does not pose a sufficiently high degree of stretch and challenge.

Early years provision

Good

- Most children start in Reception class with skills that are typically average for their age. The 'learning through play' curriculum enables children to learn and develop at their own pace. The inspector observed children fully engaged in activities who were able to share their learning with adults. Adult intervention and precise questioning ensures that children are on track to meet their targets.
- The proportion of children reaching a good level of development by the end of Reception is above the national average, which ensures that they are well prepared for the next stage of their learning in Year 1.
- The curriculum promotes good progress in mathematical understanding. One child was able to use resources to show his understanding of place value. He was able to demonstrate, independently, how he could use a resource to show the number and place value of 2,321. Consequently, children make good progress in number.
- In early years, there is a strong focus on communication and language. Children develop language first and foremost. Children are able to use their phonics knowledge to sound out unfamiliar words. They use resources well to match the word to a picture such as 'helm', enabling them to build a strong vocabulary before writing. Children make good progress in phonics and in the area of communication and language.
- The school's themed topic curriculum is taught through the 'great lesson'. It allows children's learning to take many directions, depending on their interests. The school's theme, 'The coming of man', allows children to explore prehistoric animals. Children are able to suggest reasons for the extinction of the sabre toothed-tiger and woolly mammoth. Regular communication informs parents about the current learning so that this can continue outside the classroom. Consequently children are inspired to continue their learning at home, engaging parents to support their children so that pupils gain a deeper understanding about their topic.
- The early years learning environment is able to meet the range of interests and abilities of the children. It is well equipped with resources which are inviting, and are easily accessible for all children. An emphasis on a resource-based curriculum is evident throughout the school, which starts in the early years. Children are taught from a very

young age how to select appropriate resources to support learning, particularly in number and language. Children become independent learners very early on and this builds their confidence and self-esteem. Consequently, children thrive and are happy to attempt a range of tasks and activities confidently in all areas of learning.

- Children of mixed ages work well together. Older children support the younger children, giving them a sense of responsibility. For example, during a phonics lesson, incorporating the teaching and learning and application of initial sounds, an older child was observed supporting a younger child. This collaboration develops strong friendships from early on in the child's schooling. Discussions with older year groups suggest that this is maintained throughout the children's time at the school.
- Parents play an important part in their children's learning. The home-school diary ensures that communication is frequent and information about the child is current. The 'tree of knowledge' allows parents to contribute information and knowledge about their child's experiences from outside the classroom. This enables the school to build a picture of the individual child and match activities more precisely to help children to make progress quickly.
- The early years leader has a good understanding of how to use children's achievement information to ensure that all children make progress. She analyses the children's starting points and plans learning to meet their needs. The early years leader works with the nursery school to ensure that there is a smooth transition. From the children's starting points they make good progress in all areas of learning.
- Safeguarding is effective. Staff have a good understanding of safeguarding procedures and apply them well. Children are safe and happy in the setting.

School details

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| Unique reference number | 135594 |
| DfE registration number | 881/6058 |
| Inspection number | 10026068 |

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.

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| Type of school | Other independent school |
| School category | Independent school |
| Age range of pupils | 4 to 11 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | 47 |
| Number of part-time pupils | 7 |
| Proprietor | Sarah Rowledge |
| Principal | Sarah Rowledge |
| Annual fees (day pupils) | £6,785 |
| Telephone number | 01376 564392 |
| Website | http://coggeshallmontessori.co.uk |
| Email address | soaringhighschool@btconnect.com |
| Date of previous inspection | 31 January – 1 February 2012 |

Information about this school

- Soaring High School is registered with the Department for Education (DfE) as an independent day school for boys and girls aged four to 11. The school occupies a small site in rural surroundings.
- The school follows the philosophy and curriculum developed through the works of Maria Montessori. Pupils are taught in mixed-age classes. The three classes comprise children in Reception Year and Years 1 and 2, Years 3 and 4 and Years 5 and 6.
- The school makes use of specialist Montessori teaching materials across all year groups.
- Most pupils are of White British heritage.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is below

the national average. No pupil has a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan.

- The school aims to 'develop and promote motivated, enthusiastic learners that have a thirst for knowledge, a deep respect for themselves, their community and their environment'.
- The school does not make use of any alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

- This inspection was conducted with one day's notice.
- The inspector observed learning in every class and across a range of subjects. Some of these observations were carried out jointly with the principal. The inspector also looked at the work in pupils' books.
- Meetings were held with the principal, the deputy principal and middle leaders including the early years leader. The inspector also met with two groups of pupils.
- The inspector scrutinised a range of school documentation including: the self-evaluation summary; the school improvement plan; policies; records of attendance and behaviour; and the school's single central register of vetting checks of staff.
- The inspector considered 29 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, as well as 12 responses to the staff questionnaire.

Inspection team

John Daniell, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

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