

Garden City Montessori School

269 Icknield Way, Letchworth Garden City, Hertfordshire SG6 4UE

Inspection dates

21–23 February 2017

Overall effectiveness	Requires improvement
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Requires improvement
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Requires improvement
Early years provision	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Leaders' evaluation of the school's effectiveness is not sufficiently robust and is over-generous.
- School improvement plans do not address all of the areas that require improvement.
- Leaders' monitoring of teaching, learning and assessment is not sufficiently routine or systematic. Leaders are not fully aware of the training or support staff need.
- Two of the independent school standards are not met because pupils make expected, rather than good, progress.
- Staff do not have consistently high expectations of what pupils can achieve and some pupils do not move on quickly enough to accelerate their learning.
- Teaching time is not used productively enough and the learning activities do not take sufficient account of what pupils know and can do.
- Some senior leaders' roles are underdeveloped.
- Governors have not established clear lines of accountability for all aspects of the school's work.

The school has the following strengths

- Leaders have created a safe and nurturing environment that enables pupils to develop social skills highly effectively.
- Pupils work well together. They appreciate and respect cultural differences.
- Pupils are courteous and respectful. They conduct themselves well throughout the day.
- In the early years provision, teachers have high expectations and match work to children's needs well. Consequently, the children make good progress.
- The school has a real sense of community, which leads to pupils' positive engagement with the local community.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

- The school must take action to meet the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements. The details are listed in the full report.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve leadership and management by:
 - ensuring that all of the independent school standards are met
 - establishing systems to systematically monitor, review and evaluate the school's effectiveness, and devising plans to address the issues identified
 - sharpening the checks leaders make on teaching so that they can accurately identify the impact of teaching on learning, and teachers' training needs
 - establishing strong leadership with clear lines of accountability for different areas of the school's performance.
- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment so that it secures good outcomes across the school by ensuring that:
 - all staff have sufficiently high expectations of what pupils can achieve
 - staff guide pupils promptly towards challenging work that is closely matched to their ability.

The school must meet the following independent school standards

- The proprietors must ensure that teaching at the school:
 - enables pupils to acquire new knowledge and make good progress according to their ability so that they increase their understanding and develop their skills in the subjects taught;
 - shows a good understanding of the aptitudes, needs and prior attainments of the pupils, and ensures that these are taken into account in the planning of lessons;

(paragraph 3, 3(a), 3(d))

- The proprietors must ensure that persons with leadership and management responsibilities at the school:
 - demonstrate good skills and knowledge appropriate to their role so that the independent school standards are met consistently;
 - fulfil their responsibilities effectively so that the independent school standards are met consistently;

(paragraph 34(1)(a), 34(1)(b))

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- The head of school is responsible for virtually all areas of leadership and management. This worked well when the school had fewer pupils and a stable group of staff. As pupil numbers have increased, some roles have not developed sufficiently. The leadership of teaching, learning and assessment is a case in point. Governors, staff and the head of school are aware of these issues and share a strong commitment to put measures in place so that the school is the best that it can be.
- Leaders' assessment of the school's effectiveness is not sufficiently evaluative. Leaders are not measuring the school's effectiveness closely enough against the standards by which it will be judged. There are no suitable plans in place to help leaders do what is needed to make the school's effectiveness good.
- Leaders' monitoring of teaching and learning over time is not sufficiently rigorous or systematic. Leaders' formal observations of teaching are sometimes incomplete. Teaching staff do not have the individual training they need to help them improve.
- The head of school has created a calm, friendly and nurturing environment that enables pupils to thrive socially and emotionally. Staff morale is extremely high and the head of school has created a cohesive team, which she leads by example.
- Parents overwhelmingly praise the positive impact the school has on their children.
- Leaders provide a rich, balanced and unique curriculum. Pupils explore the areas that interest them. They develop the skills that help them to understand better and practise the skills needed to consolidate their learning. They work well alongside others in a safe, caring and nurturing environment.
- The curriculum helps pupils to develop a secure appreciation of fundamental British values. Democracy and mutual respect are encouraged through discussions, such as how to spend the money collected through various fund-raising events.
- Pupils are being well prepared to become good citizens. Leaders stress the importance of working together as a cohesive group and, as a result, pupils demonstrate an empathy that is unusual for their age. One parent spoke of their child's insistence on spending Christmas Day distributing clothing, hampers and presents for families who cannot afford to buy them. The event, organised by school leaders, helps pupils develop a true meaning of community and appreciate that their actions can improve the lives of others significantly.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness is developed highly effectively. Pupils are excited and enthusiastic about the sponsorship of a Ugandan student. 'Wonderful Wednesdays', where pupils serve lunches, play games and sing songs with elderly people in the local community, bring a real sense of togetherness and well-being.

Governance

- Governors have wide-ranging and appropriate expertise to support school improvement, but acknowledge the need to support leaders more effectively in some areas. They are actively looking at ways in which the board can extend its range of expertise, specifically at senior leadership level.
- Since the material change inspection in July 2015, when some of the independent school standards evaluated at that time were unlikely to be met, the governing body has developed its understanding of the requirements of the standards. As a result, during this inspection, all of the independent school standards are met, with the exception of those that refer to pupils making good progress.
- Governors are highly visible around the school. They have successfully overseen the growth in pupil numbers, which recently has been more rapid. They update the business development plan on an increasingly frequent basis. Financial control is tight and money is well spent.
- Although the formal evaluation of the school's effectiveness is underdeveloped, governors are able to articulate the school's strengths and areas that require improvement clearly.
- Governors have ensured that all school policies are in place, including the publishing of a suitable safeguarding policy on its website.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders carry out all of the required pre-employment checks for staff and accurately record these in the single central register.
- All staff have received training, including induction, relating to keeping children safe. The training includes online safety and awareness of the signs of extremism and radicalisation.
- The frequent updates for staff mean that all have a clear understanding of what to look for and the actions they must take where they have safeguarding concerns about pupils. Where safeguarding concerns do arise, they are reported appropriately and the school works closely with all relevant parties to support the pupils concerned.
- Leaders carry out health and safety checks regularly and act upon any concerns raised. The school carries out detailed risk assessments on all aspects of school life.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- Some teachers do not set work that takes sufficient account of what pupils can do or track pupils' progress closely enough. Pupils do not feel challenged, they lose focus, and time in lessons is not used productively enough for pupils to make good progress over time.
- Some teachers do not spend enough time ensuring that pupils are familiar with the materials and the school's style of learning, which prevents some pupils from making the progress they should.

- Some teachers record methodically what pupils can do and how they learn, and adapt materials to meet each child's needs, which helps them improve quickly. Teachers' skilful intervention helps some pupils to deepen their knowledge and understanding well.
- Where practice is most effective, pupils learn in a calm and purposeful environment. Teachers organise activities well. Pupils develop the ability to solve problems, research and question, while extending their language and mathematical skills. Consequently, some pupils develop into inquisitive, resilient and independent learners.
- Staff are highly motivated to do well for the pupils. Parents see that their children become positive, confident and happy. Parents appreciate the dedication of the staff and the many opportunities that exist to discuss any matters that arise. Informal conversations, regular updates and progress reports help to inform parents well about what their children learn.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils are well cared for and safe. They say that the school is a caring environment.
- Parents spoke to inspectors of their faith in the school to ensure that their children flourish, because they feel safe and are loved by the staff. Parents who expressed their opinions were unequivocal in their views that their children feel safe at school. As one parent said, 'The school is like a second parent.'
- Pupils appreciate the wide range of activities, the high-quality resources, and the good opportunities to play, explore and discover.
- Leaders gain a clear picture of each child's individual social needs through frequent interaction with them. Teachers' daily observations help to track each pupil's social development and investigate where issues arise. Teachers can then deal with the root cause of any issues, perhaps a child's emotional well-being, rather than focusing solely on the presented behaviours.
- Leaders have established a culture of respect and tolerance. Pupils follow clear, fair and firm guidelines on how to behave and treat others. The regular opportunities to work with others help pupils to communicate and deal with conflicts effectively. Pupils say that this helps them to feel safe.
- The school keeps parents well informed about the progress their children make. Parents are invited to observe their child's learning through the 'viewing window', which shows the open culture that exists within the school.
- Pupils are well motivated to continue working on school projects at home, because teachers adapt practices and materials to accommodate each child's particular interests and curiosities.
- Pupils leave school feeling encouraged, supported and inspired, which is often a significant difference from their previous negative experiences in other settings.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- School records show that there are no reported cases of serious misbehaviour or bullying.
- Pupils conduct themselves extremely well throughout the day. They are polite, courteous and engaging. Pupils were keen to meet inspectors and share with them what they are learning about.
- Pupils enjoy break- and mealtimes because they mirror a congenial family gathering.
- The well-practised routines enable pupils to become fully independent. They clear resources away after them, so they are ready to use for the next person.
- Staff model clear expectations about how to treat each other kindly, and spend time explaining this to pupils when they make mistakes. Pupils follow staff's good examples, which develops their self-discipline that prepares them well for the future.
- Pupils enjoy coming to school. They play well and enjoy learning together, treating each other with courtesy and respect.
- Levels of attendance are above national figures.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- Teachers' tracking of pupils' progress from their starting points is not sufficiently rigorous to have an accurate picture of how well pupils achieve across the school or across a range of subjects.
- Inspectors did not see the evidence in books or elsewhere that shows that pupils make sufficiently good gains in their learning over time, especially in geography, geometry and mathematics.
- Pupils' progress varies too much between classes.
- Pupils do not make consistently good progress in reading, writing and mathematics across the school.
- Some pupils develop good learning behaviours by following carefully planned routines. They develop their time management skills, for example by writing down their planned activities for the day on the class whiteboard. Some pupils place a hand on the teacher's shoulders to signal that they require assistance; it prevents them shouting across the room or interrupting others. As a result, the school equips pupils effectively with the skills to become creative thinkers and independent learners.
- For some pupils, the well-established routines, tailored provision and appropriate support and guidance help pupils, including the most able, to make good progress from their starting points.

Early years provision

Good

- The school meets all the statutory requirements for early years provision, including those related to safeguarding children.

- Leaders have an extremely accurate picture of the quality of the early years provision and act quickly to carry out any improvements.
- On entering the school, teachers assess children's skills comprehensively and accurately to establish what they know and can do in each of the areas of learning.
- Children adapt quickly to the school's Montessori ethos and approach to learning because teachers skilfully plan activities to meet their needs.
- Teachers track progress successfully from children's starting points, which are broadly typical for their age, through daily observations. Teachers review and adapt learning programmes every six weeks to ensure that children make good progress.
- When the children are ready to leave the Reception Year, they are well prepared to move on to Year 1.
- Children are confident, motivated and keen to learn. The safe, caring and nurturing environment helps them to progress well from their different starting points.
- Children are able to access a full range of activities, both indoors and outdoors. Materials, for example the sensory cushions and outdoor play equipment, are specifically adapted to meet each child's needs. Children find the resources interesting, challenging and accessible to all.
- A strong emphasis on developing children's speaking skills means that children communicate effectively with their friends and adults.
- All staff have high expectations and model how they expect children to behave. Staff praise children when they do well and persistently challenge behaviour that does not meet their uniformly high standards. Children enjoy the praise staff give them and it motivates them to achieve more.
- The wide range of extra-curricular activities helps children understand the core values of the school. The trips to the National History Museum, the Science Museum and Whipsnade Zoo, the after-school cooking club, and the Saturday bowling, cinema, and dinner trips give the school a real family feel. This, coupled with children's safe daily routines, contributes to their excellent personal development.
- Leaders have extended provision by opening a nursery section. This room is well resourced. Although this is a very recent addition, teachers' high expectations and effective practice provide a safe, caring and nurturing environment for the children.

School details

Unique reference number	142413
DfE registration number	919/6001
Inspection number	10012985

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	Other independent school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	2 to 12
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	28
Number of part-time pupils	9
Proprietor	Elim Four Square Gospel Alliance
Chair	John Draper
Head of School	Sarah Cummins
Annual fees (day pupils)	£5,235 to £9,225
Telephone number	01462 889271
Website	www.montessorigc.com
Email address	sarah_cummins@montessorigc.com
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- Garden City Montessori is an independent day school. It opened in January 2015 with four pupils. Over the past two years, the school has grown in size. There are currently 28 pupils on roll.
- A very small number of pupils speak English as an additional language. Currently, no pupils are identified as having special educational needs and /or disabilities.
- The proprietor is the Elim Four Square Gospel Alliance. The governing body is made up of staff from the school and representatives from the church.

- The Department for Education (DfE) commissioned Ofsted to consider the proprietor's request for a material change in July 2015. The DfE approved the school's application in August 2015. The school is now registered to provide education for pupils aged two to 12 years.
- The school is registered for 50 pupils. It very recently opened a nursery provision for children below the age of three.
- The school follows the ethos and teaching methods of Maria Montessori and aims to provide each child with an individual learning experience. The curriculum is designed to nurture independence and self-confidence.
- The school provides an extended school day with before-school care and after-school clubs and activities.
- There are three classrooms: the nursery for children aged up to three years; primary for children and pupils aged between three and six years; and elementary for pupils aged six to 12 years.
- The head of school is also at present the lead teacher in the primary class that includes early years children.
- This is the school's first standard inspection.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors examined a wide range of documents. These documents included the school's self-evaluation, school improvement plans, policies, information about the curriculum, safeguarding documents, minutes of governing body meetings and information about the progress, behaviour and attendance of pupils.
- The school's compliance with the regulations for independent schools was checked.
- Inspectors visited all classes on both of the full days of the inspection to observe learning throughout the school, sometimes jointly with the head of school.
- Inspectors heard pupils read and looked at a wide range of pupils' work, including pupils' journals, individual achievement folders and photographic evidence.
- Inspectors spoke to pupils throughout the inspection to gain their views.
- The lead inspector made a thorough tour of the school and looked at the school's single central record of employment checks.
- Inspectors met with the head of school, teachers, support staff, the chair of the governing body and the business operations manager. Five responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire were considered.
- Inspectors considered the 12 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View. Inspectors met with parents at the beginning of the school day, and the lead inspector spoke to one parent by phone, to ask them about their opinions of the school.
- Currently, the school does not have any children or pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Additionally, the number of disadvantaged pupils is fewer than five. As such, neither of these areas features in this report.

Inspection team

John Randall, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Tracy Fielding

Her Majesty's Inspector

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