

River House Montessori School

Unit C, Great Eastern Enterprise, 3 Millharbour, London E14 9XP

Inspection dates

1–3 May 2018

Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
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

- Pupils achieve well across a wide range of subjects through an exciting curriculum. Their writing, reading and mathematics work is good.
- The Montessori foundation of the school is well used by staff, helping pupils to be inquisitive, confident and creative.
- Pupils are highly enthused and committed. They bounce happily into school and lessons, and really enjoy their learning and play. They are kind to each other and polite.
- Children make a strong start in the early years.
- Pupils feel very safe and secure, as they are well cared for and safeguarded by the staff. This applies equally in the main school day and in the well-organised extended provision.
- Pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities, as well as those who speak English as an additional language, achieve well.
- Pupils are well known to staff as individuals, which parents and carers much appreciate.
- The school is a compassionate and inclusive community, reflecting the school's values.
- The good, highly individualised, secondary provision is appreciated by the pupils.
- Parents are pleased with the school and would recommend it to others.
- Teaching is good. In some lessons, nevertheless, pupils are not challenged enough, or their learning proceeds too slowly.
- The school is well led and managed. It meets all of the independent school standards. However, governors do not challenge senior managers robustly to secure further improvements.
- The school's development plan, and the associated actions, are not sharply enough targeted on pupils' academic outcomes.
- Attendance is below the national average and the school has not fully analysed or resolved this.

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?

- Improve leadership and management, by:
 - ensuring that priorities and actions to secure development are sharply focused on improving outcomes further
 - checking carefully the impact of actions to promote improvement
 - ensuring that governors provide greater challenge to senior managers.
- Ensure that pupils are consistently well challenged in all lessons.
- Raise considerably pupils' attendance rates.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The school is led with great passion and commitment by a well-functioning team of six senior managers. Each manager has a clear remit. The school has successfully developed and grown its own staff into these senior positions.
- Managers have high aspirations for the pupils. These are well supported by the clear Montessori ethos, which the staff use sensitively to allow pupils to develop at their own pace and pursue their individual interests and ideas. Middle managers are successful in leading, developing and improving their subjects and areas of responsibility.
- The curriculum is well structured and stimulating. Within one day, pupils could find themselves building a tower, writing a story, investigating the permeability of rocks, playing an instrument, helping a friend and painting a picture. Secondary pupils benefit from a very wide range of subject choices, often with individual tuition.
- The school day, and timetabling, is tightly arranged so that everything runs smoothly, and the school's well-kept facilities are used efficiently for everyone.
- Provision for pupils who speak English as an additional language, and for the increasing number of those who have SEN and/or disabilities, is well organised.
- Managers ensure that pupils have good opportunities to develop socially, morally, spiritually and culturally. Pupils know that everyone, from whatever ethnic, linguistic or religious background, is special and important. Pupils enjoy 'international weeks', which help pupils to celebrate and appreciate diversity. Pupils are prepared effectively for life in modern Britain.
- The school evaluates itself fairly and honestly. Senior and middle managers monitor the quality of teaching suitably. The school runs a useful programme of training and development for staff, who mainly feel very well supported. Staff have a good understanding of the school's priorities.
- The school's development plan is not sufficiently focused on driving improvements to pupils' academic outcomes. The way managers check the impact of the school's improvement work is sometimes not as precise as it should be. While managers know each individual pupil well, they do not routinely identify overall patterns in pupils' achievement. This makes it hard for managers to test fully the success of their actions and to arrange further, precisely focused, improvement work.
- Parents confirm that staff are readily accessible, to resolve any individual queries. Records indicate that complaints or concerns are generally well resolved. Some parents feel that the school could do more to communicate with them about strategic and whole-school matters, beyond those about their individual children.

Governance

- The six senior managers are responsible for governance. They check each other's work through sensible, practical discussions. As a group, they ensure that the independent school standards are met and that any significant problems are addressed. They promote and expect high standards. Together, the senior managers ensure that pupils thrive.

- However, governors do not sufficiently challenge senior managers to raise pupils' academic outcomes further, and improve pupils' attendance.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- There is an effective and regular programme of staff training. New members of staff receive training immediately on joining the school, and all staff receive regular updates. Staff therefore know their roles in child protection and preventing abuse. The safeguarding policy, which reflects the latest guidance, is available on the school website. The school site is secure. Pupils feel very safe and well cared for. The school's recording procedures are correct and thorough. Checks on staff and other adults who may have contact with the pupils are carried out and recorded in a timely manner. Emergency drills and risk assessments are undertaken correctly, including for visits made off site.
- Through well-planned assemblies and the curriculum, pupils learn how to keep themselves safe in various situations, including when online.
- The school suitably protects pupils from risks associated with extremism and radicalisation.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teaching across the school, and in the range of different subjects, engages and motivates pupils well, so that they learn well.
- Teachers explain the subject content clearly, and pupils know what is expected of them. Resources, including Montessori equipment, which enables pupils to explore and develop their own ideas and interests, are used well to engross pupils.
- Staff know the pupils, and their learning needs, very well. Adults provide high-quality, individualised feedback to pupils, so that they can immediately improve their work. The secondary phase teaching meets pupils' needs and aptitudes very well, and they make good progress.
- Teachers, often working in suitably equipped specialist rooms, contribute much through their secure subject knowledge. This makes lessons very interesting and purposeful. In art, for example, pupils contributed knowledgeably to a teacher-led discussion about paintings by LS Lowry. They then carefully practised their skills in charcoal sketching, in Lowry's style, benefiting from personalised advice from the teacher.
- Homework is set in reasonable amounts and is well linked to learning in class. Parents and pupils value this.
- In some classes across the school, teachers miss opportunities to stretch and challenge individual pupils, or groups of pupils, sufficiently. Pupils are sometimes given tasks that are too easy, and pupils do not move on quickly enough to do more challenging work.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Staff are adept at working closely with parents, and other agencies if needed, to help them to resolve any difficulties. Parents support this view, saying that help is well tailored.
- Parents are delighted at the personal attention and help their children receive from staff. One said, speaking for many, 'Staff closely understand [pupils'] needs.' This view is fully supported by inspection evidence.
- The school teaches pupils very well how to care for each other, through the well-established 'peace curriculum', for example. Staff are good role models. New pupils are carefully and warmly inducted. Pupils are happy to take on responsibility, for example by self-assuredly leading games like 'Simon says' for others.
- Staff look after pupils closely in the extended hours sessions outside of the school day. Pupils make independent choices from a wide range of activities. Pupils enjoy the limited range of organised activities and clubs.
- Pupils are offered appropriate careers advice and are well supported in the transfer to new schools.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils are full of enthusiasm. In lessons, they are very positive, lively and inquisitive in their thinking. Pupils concentrate closely on their work and activities. Staff follow the school's behaviour policy correctly.
- Pupils say that staff are always supportive and kind. If any problems occur, such as misbehaviour or a falling out, staff proactively help the pupils concerned to resolve matters fully, step by step. Bullying is very rare.
- Pupils of all ages play kindly and safely together. In the playground, they choose from a wide range of activities and equipment. Staff join in with them and promote high-quality play. This leads to a lot of fun, and valuable informal learning.
- Pupils are typically polite, friendly and confident. Just occasionally, some behaviour around the site becomes over-exuberant, but it remains safe. There have been no recent exclusions of pupils.
- The attendance of pupils has fallen to below the national average. Leaders do not have an in-depth understanding of reasons behind the fall in attendance rates.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Pupils achieve and progress well across the school. Most pupils show good competence in mathematics, are adept readers, and write well for their age. Those who read to inspectors did so fluently and accurately, with enjoyment and good comprehension.
- Pupils do well in the other subjects too. Pupils readily apply their knowledge and understanding, in a very wide range of subjects, into new and different contexts. They

enjoy presenting their work assuredly to others.

- The small number of pupils who have taken GCSE examinations so far have done well. Through effective careers advice and guidance, older secondary pupils are clear about what they want to do after leaving the school.
- Pupils who speak English as an additional language are well taught and, where needed, learn quickly to speak functional English.
- Pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities make good progress, in line with their peers.
- Reports to parents are thorough. Pupils are well prepared for their next stages of education. For example, they are effectively helped to succeed in tests and interviews.

Early years provision

Good

- Children achieve well in the 'pre-school' and Reception classes. They develop great dispositions for learning, including concentrating for extended periods, planning tasks themselves, listening carefully, and working well individually and in groups. They are well prepared for Year 1.
- Children benefit from a good range of well-planned, varied learning activities. These build on their previous experiences, in and out of school. Children begin to understand the world around them excellently. One parent agreed with others that: 'Children come home with all sorts of interesting ideas. Progress is better than we had expected.'
- The early years provision is well led. Leaders have an accurate view of the quality of provision and children's progress. Welfare and safeguarding requirements are robust.
- The children are attentive and keen. They explain their learning activities articulately, even when English is not their first language. They enjoy school. Some said they feel 'super good' at school.
- Last year, children in the early years performed slightly less well in early writing than in some other aspects of learning, including reading. Staff addressed this. Children are now making substantial progress in writing.
- Astute questioning by staff of groups and individuals helps children to improve their thinking. Children become adept at correcting themselves independently. However, sometimes teachers' expectations of children are not sufficiently ambitious.
- Staff speak regularly with parents, who contribute to the assessment of their children. However, staff do not use this information routinely to support children's learning further.
- The restrictions of the building mean that there is no scope for children to move freely between the indoors and outdoors. This problem is mitigated by carefully planned lessons outdoors and the specific Montessori sessions, where children pursue their interests and creative ideas productively.

School details

Unique reference number	100303
DfE registration number	211/6385
Inspection number	10026270

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	3 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	338
Proprietor	River House Montessori School Ltd
Administration Director	Janet Pearson
Principal	Sarah Greenwood
Annual fees (core hours)	£10,500
Telephone number	020 75389886
Website	www.river-house.co.uk
Email address	enquire@river-house.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	24 March 2011

Information about this school

- River House Montessori School, whose teaching and curriculum is based on Montessori principles, was founded in 1994 by the principal and the administration director. Its leadership, and governance, is shared among six senior managers.
- The school moved to its present site, in the Docklands area of the London Borough of Tower Hamlets, in 2009. Pupils come from many different ethnicities and backgrounds, speaking between them over 40 languages.
- The school was last inspected seven years ago, in a light-touch inspection. It was judged to be good.
- The number of pupils on roll has risen since the last inspection. A small part of this

increase is due to the introduction in September 2011 of secondary provision, which currently caters for five pupils. Only pupils who have attended the school in their primary years may stay for their secondary education.

- None of the pupils attend provision off-site.
- The proportion of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is above the national average.
- Pupils may attend in 'core' school hours from 9.00am to 4.00pm or for 'extended' hours from 8.00am to 6.00pm. Extended provision, for the full day, also operates outside term time.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed lessons and extended provision across the school, in some cases jointly with senior managers. They observed around the school throughout the day.
- Inspectors evaluated samples of pupils' work in several subjects and discussed the work with some pupils.
- Inspectors held discussions with the senior managers and many members of staff. They met with pupils formally and informally, including groups of primary and secondary pupils. They heard pupils from Year 2 read.
- Inspectors reviewed documents, including school planning and evaluations, assessments of pupils, records of premises maintenance, attendance, admissions and behaviour, as well as minutes of meetings.
- The lead inspector undertook a tour of the premises with the administration director.
- Inspectors took account of the views of parents from the 48 responses on Parent View, Ofsted's online survey. They also met with a group of parents. Inspectors also considered the opinions of 42 staff members who completed questionnaires.

Inspection team

Robin Hammerton, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Andrew Rigby	Ofsted Inspector

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