

High Elms Manor School

Independent school standard inspection report

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Reporting inspector	Peter R Jones

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Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester
M2 7LA

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
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Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out by Ofsted under Section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005, 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.^{1, 2}

The inspection of registered provision was conducted under Section 49(2) of the Childcare Act 2006.^{3, 4}

Information about the school

High Elms Manor School, formerly known as St. Andrew's Montessori School, is a small, independent day primary school in Watford providing full-time and part-time education, day care, and before-school and after-school care. The headteacher is also the proprietor of the school, which opened in 1991. The school is divided into four parts. The Nest provides full-time and part-time day care for under-3s. The Children's House (Early Years Foundation Stage), also known as Little Elms, caters for children aged from 3 to 5+ years who attend full-time or part-time. Twenty-seven of the children in this class are in government-funded places. The Lower Elementary class is for pupils in Years 1 to 3 (ages 5 to 8 years) and the Upper Elementary class is for Years 4 to 6 (ages 8 to 11 years). The school employs Montessori teaching methods and all the teachers are Montessori trained. There are 68 pupils on roll of whom 48 are aged 5 years or under. Some pupils in the Lower and Upper Elementary classes have learning needs and/or disabilities and some have emotional or behavioural difficulties. One pupil has a statement of special educational needs. The school was last inspected in January 2008. The school's main aims are to prepare children for life, to help them learn how to learn, to give them a sense of worth and to allow them to be valued for their contribution to school life.

Evaluation of the school

The quality of education is good and the school meets its aims. The overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage and under-3s provision is good. Pupil's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and their behaviour are good. Safeguarding and the arrangements for pupils' welfare, health and safety are good. The school was judged to be good by the previous inspection and the school has made satisfactory progress in addressing the regulations that were not met in the last report. The school meets all of the regulatory requirements.

¹ www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2002/ukpga_20020032_en_14#pt10-ch1-pb4-l1g162

² www.opsi.gov.uk/ACTS/acts2005/ukpga_20050018_en_15#sch8

³ Schools which provide childcare for children from birth until the term in which they reach their third birthday must register this provision separately with Ofsted.

⁴ www.opsi.gov.uk/ACTS/acts2006/ukpga_20060021_en_4#pt3-ch2-pb4-l1g49

Quality of education

The quality of the curriculum is good. It closely follows the established principles of the Montessori method, meets the school's aims and is well designed to help pupils make progress. Subjects are identified in keeping with the Montessori approach and pupils gain good experience in linguistic, mathematical and scientific areas.

Technological knowledge is developed through investigation and practical work. Pupils' experience in art develops well through observational drawing and creative work in paint and oil pastel. Drama and music add to pupils' aesthetic and creative experience. The curriculum makes good provision for human and social experience and physical experience is provided through regular weekly sessions of physical education and games. There is adequate provision for personal, social and health education, although this is not as well or explicitly planned as other subject areas. Curriculum planning is well designed to ensure the progressive development of knowledge, skills and understanding, including literacy and numeracy. It is well judged to suit the age and abilities of pupils, and to allow them to make progress. Lessons are successfully planned to encourage pupils to listen carefully to information, to explain their views and to express their opinions.

The curriculum is enhanced by learning resources designed to promote good understanding of concepts. Good use is made of practical experiences to enhance the curriculum through the Forest School and allotments in the school grounds. Good use is also made of computer learning programs to reinforce literacy and numeracy skills. There is appropriate provision for extra-curricular activities including visits out of school, swimming, ju-jitsu, horse riding and piano lessons.

The quality of teaching and assessment is good and enables the pupils to make at least steady and often good progress in their learning and in their personal development. Teachers have a very secure knowledge of Montessori methods and apply these to good effect in the classroom. Teachers plan successfully to allow pupils to make some decisions about the order in which they will study their weekly topics. This encourages pupils to think for themselves and to become keen learners. The learning needs of pupils, including the most and least able, are met through carefully planned individual work programmes which make good use of detailed curriculum content to plan progression and through targeted support from teachers and classroom assistants. The special needs co-ordinator works closely with class teachers to successfully manage the learning needs of pupils. The individual support given to pupils with mild behavioural difficulties in helping them to concentrate, remain calm and stay on task is a strength of the teaching.

Teaching shows good and confident subject knowledge; teachers are able to clearly explain difficult concepts. Teaching and learning resources are of good quality, many designed specifically for the Montessori method to demonstrate concepts in a practical way. Teachers use information and communication technology (ICT) effectively as a teaching tool through computer learning programmes for individual pupils but the lack of interactive whiteboards limits the extent to which teachers can use up-to-date ICT-based teaching resources for group or whole-class activities. The

school has a collection of fiction and non-fiction books which, while adequate in number, contains a proportion of books which are dated and of limited use.

Teachers accurately assess pupils' progress. They have good knowledge of the work of pupils through day-to-day classroom contact and through working with the same small group of pupils over time. Teachers make conscientious use of individual pupil records showing how they cover and master the detailed Montessori curriculum targets. The school is aware that not enough is known about individual and year group progress against more standardised norms matched to the age and ability of pupils. To address this, staff are beginning to use a computerised program to capture and analyse performance data. Marking is regular and provides pupils with suitable targets for improvement.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Pupils have a good awareness of the spiritual through the emphasis the Montessori curriculum gives to the inter-relation of humanity with God and the universe, and through the broadly Christian character of the school. The development of pupils' social skills is good and reflects the strong sense of community and mutual respect which permeates the school. The pupils enjoy school, and their behaviour is good. They know right from wrong and are aware that poor behaviour has consequences. Those pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties develop skills which allow them to cope well with social interaction in the classroom and beyond. Pupils like being able to make choices about how they sequence their work, and this affords them a measure of independence and responsibility. They enjoy taking on responsibilities such as being monitors in their classrooms and in the dining area. The pupils develop good cultural awareness through the rich variety of curriculum materials from different genres and periods in, for example, art and English, and through the Montessori focus on locating and naming countries of the world and finding out about their cultures. The pupils learn about cultural diversity in the United Kingdom through assemblies led by pupils from various ethnic backgrounds reflecting the celebration of religious festivals.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

Provision for the welfare, health and safety of pupils is good. Pupils are well safeguarded because the school's recruitment procedures include rigorous checks on staff credentials prior to confirmation of appointment. The school maintains a single central register of appointments which meets requirements. All the necessary policies and procedures to keep pupils safe, including fire safety and first aid, are in place. Pastoral care arrangements are good. The pupils are well cared for and carefully supervised. Pupils are known personally by the senior management team, who carefully oversee pastoral arrangements. The pupils' varying needs are known and well met by the teachers. Healthy eating is encouraged by the provision of healthy school meals. The school provides regular physical education and games, and the extensive grounds are used throughout break and lunchtimes for informal games and

physical activity. The school complies with the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, as amended by the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001.

Suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors

All of the required checks are used by the proprietor to confirm the suitability of all staff to work with children. The outcome of the checks and the supporting evidence is securely kept in the personnel file of each member of staff, and the required information is entered onto a single central register of appointments. All the relevant regulations are met.

Premises and accommodation at the school

The accommodation for the main school and Early Years Foundation Stage and under-3s is adequate for its purpose and provides enough space and range of classrooms for effective learning. The school buildings are in a suitable state of repair and decorative order. The school is located in extensive grounds with large grassed areas which are suitable for recreation, physical education and games. All regulations are met.

Provision of information

The information required to be given to parents, carers and guardians is provided in the school's prospectus and on its internet website, which also indicate what information can be made available to parents on request. The school has good and productive links with parents and others, and they are kept up to date with school events and changes to routine. The school maintains regular informal contact with parents and parent/teacher meetings are well documented. Annual reports are thorough and informative, though they lack targets for improvement. There are regular and informative newsletters. Parents report in questionnaire responses and in discussion with inspectors that they are very happy with the school's provision and value the care and attention their children receive. The required reports to the local authority on pupils with statements of special educational needs are completed. All of the regulations are met.

Manner in which complaints are to be handled

The school has in place an appropriate complaints policy which meets the regulations.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

All children exhibit great enjoyment in their learning and make good progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Provision for under-3s is good and meets the requirements of the Early Years Register. Through both the Montessori curriculum and elements of the Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum, children develop a

good awareness of how to keep themselves safe. Their good attitudes to learning, engendered by the Montessori curriculum, provide a good basis for future learning. Adults support children's learning and development well. Planning and provision ensures that children have a wealth of learning experiences covering all aspects of development and building on their previous learning. Active play and exploration is at the heart of learning both indoors and outdoors. Overall, individual needs are identified well and activities are carefully tailored to children's needs and capabilities. Key people are very aware of the welfare needs of their charges.

The school's strong and inclusive ethos ensures that children are adequately safeguarded and that their welfare needs are met: as a result, children generally achieve as well as they can. The school works well with parents to ensure that they can play a full part in their child's education and transition arrangements limit children's concerns when entering the school or moving on. There are good systems in place for school self-evaluation and this drives the school's vision to enable every child to succeed. Policies and procedures are in place to ensure equality of opportunity. High-quality resources, with very clear learning aims and a strong focus on training and developing the skills of staff, enable good outcomes for children. Records are carefully maintained and policies and procedures implemented. Risk assessments are regularly administered and appropriate actions taken in order to eliminate risk.

All children make a good level of progress in both their academic and social development. The leadership's capacity to make continuous improvement is reflected in the inclusion of all staff members in evaluation and ideas for improvement. There is a strong focus on training to enable the continuous development of staff capabilities. Close contacts with agencies beyond the school are maintained to improve the quality of education and this has enhanced the quality and effectiveness of the provision.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The proprietor has ensured that the school meets The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010, schedule 1 ('the Regulations').

What the school could do to improve further

While not required by regulations, the school might wish to consider the following points for development:

- put in place a more explicit scheme of work for personal, social, health and citizenship education
- further develop standardised testing and the recording of pupil performance data to better measure pupil progress over time.

Inspection judgements

outstanding	good	satisfactory	inadequate
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The quality of education

Overall quality of education		✓		
How well the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of pupils		✓		
How effective teaching and assessment are in meeting the full range of pupils' needs		✓		
How well pupils make progress in their learning		✓		

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

Quality of provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development		✓		
The behaviour of pupils		✓		

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

The overall welfare, health and safety of pupils		✓		
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The quality of the Early Years Foundation Stage provision

Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage		✓		
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage		✓		
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage		✓		
Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage		✓		

School details

School status	Independent		
Type of school	Montessori		
Date school opened	1991		
Age range of pupils	0–11		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 14	Girls: 10	Total: 24
Number on roll (part-time pupils)	Boys: 21	Girls: 23	Total: 44
Number of children aged 0–3 in registered childcare provision	Boys: 8	Girls: 8	Total: 16
Number of pupils who are looked after	Boys: 0	Girls: 0	Total: 0
Annual fees (day pupils)	£8,025		
Annual fees (childcare)	£7,600		
Address of school	High Elms Manor School, High Elms Lane, Watford, Hertfordshire, WD25 0JX		
Telephone number	01923 681103		
Email address	admin@highelmsmanorschool.com		
Headteacher	Mrs Sheila O'Neill		
Proprietor	Mrs Sheila O'Neill		