

Garden City Montessori School

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

Inspection dates

27–29 November 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	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The school complies with all of the applicable independent school standards.
- The overall effectiveness of the school has improved since the previous inspection as a result of effective leadership and management. It now provides a good quality of education.
- Leaders have ensured that teaching is good and that it meets the needs of individual pupils. Teachers use the school's chosen teaching method consistently.
- Pupils make good progress in English, mathematics and a range of other subjects. They develop a love of learning and are keen to develop their knowledge.
- Safeguarding arrangements are effective.
- Pupils learn about a range of ways to help them stay safe.
- Pupils behave very well. They are polite and respectful. Learning time is very rarely lost as a result of inappropriate behaviour.
- Governance arrangements have been strengthened and are developing.
- The school's curriculum provides pupils with learning opportunities in an appropriately wide range of subject areas.
- The early years provision gives children a good start to their education. Children settle quickly and develop good learning skills from an early age.
- The school's key priorities for further improvement have not been identified fully and plans are underdeveloped.
- Pupils' progress in writing is not as strong as in other subjects.

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?

- Develop a more strategic approach to school improvement planning by:
 - including a wider range of issues, beyond the independent school standards, when evaluating the school's effectiveness
 - improving the quality of the school's improvement plan so that it focuses clearly on the most important priorities for further improvement.
- Improve outcomes in pupils' writing by:
 - focusing teaching on developing writing, including handwriting, more frequently
 - providing pupils with more opportunities and encouragement to write at length.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The headteacher and proprietor have focused very well on ensuring that all the independent school standards are met consistently. They give the standards an appropriately high priority and they check regularly that every standard continues to be met.
- The headteacher and proprietor have worked together effectively to develop Garden City Montessori from an initial idea to the good school that it is today. The headteacher's vision to create a school that follows the chosen approach and methods closely, with the child at the centre of everything, has now been realised fully.
- Leaders have addressed the areas for improvement from the previous inspection well. They have focused on improving the quality of teaching so that it is now good throughout the school. Leaders support teachers' development well and encourage members of staff to undertake externally assessed training and qualifications.
- The school's curriculum is appropriately broad and balanced. The nature of the school's chosen approach means that pupils' interests guide their learning. However, adults are skilled at ensuring that pupils do not become 'stuck' in one area of the curriculum but, instead, encourage them to learn about a range of subjects such as history, geography, music and science.
- Leaders ensure that parents are involved fully in their children's learning, including in the early years. Two-way mirrors between the classrooms and the corridor are used to allow parents and carers to observe the pupils at work, without needing to enter the classroom. Leaders encourage parents to come in to school regularly so that they can observe the progress that their children make. Parents told inspectors that they find this to be a very enjoyable and valuable opportunity.
- Parents are very happy with the school, with some choosing to travel long distances in order for their children to attend. Almost all of the parents who responded to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, said that they would recommend the school to others. Parents spoke particularly positively to inspectors about the school's caring and nurturing ethos.
- The school promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well. Pupils are encouraged to think about and to help other people. For example, the school sponsors a child in Uganda and pupils write to her regularly, and look forward to receiving her letters in return. Pupils also help to make and distribute Christmas hampers for people in the local community.
- Pupils are prepared well for life in modern British society. They are taught to value all people as individuals, regardless of their physical or other characteristics, or their beliefs. Pupils talk openly about issues that arise, at a level appropriate to their age. For example, pupils know that there are different types of families.
- The school is a friendly and positive place. Staff enjoy working at Garden City Montessori and are proud of the school. All members of staff responded to Ofsted's questionnaire. Results of the survey were universally positive.
- The school's self-evaluation and improvement planning are underdeveloped. Leaders have not fully analysed the school's strengths and areas for improvement. As a result, priorities

are not identified as well as they could be. This means that the school's improvement plan is not sufficiently sharply focused to help the school move forward systematically. The school's plan does not include features such as measurable success criteria, deadlines and milestones that would help the proprietor to hold the school to account at regular intervals.

Emergency fire inspection

- The Department for Education (DfE) commissioned an emergency fire inspection to take place alongside the standard inspection. This was because the proprietor did not respond to the DfE's fire survey, sent to schools in July 2017, following the Grenfell Tower tragedy. The survey asked proprietors of schools to check buildings for cladding and, where appropriate, to arrange for cladding to be tested for the presence of specific, flammable components.
- Inspectors found that there were valid reasons why the DfE's email was missed when it was first sent. Leaders responded promptly to a follow-up email that was sent recently and the online survey has now been completed.
- The school's building does not have any of the features described in the DfE's fire survey. The survey was concerned with buildings of 18 metres and higher, that is, operating on three storeys or more. The school currently operates on the ground floor only. The building has an unused second floor but no third or subsequent floors.
- The school is housed in a converted church building. The building is of brick construction and does not have any cladding.
- The school's fire risk assessment was last updated in September 2018. The resulting documents show that fire risks have been assessed fully and appropriate control measures put in place. The resulting fire safety plan is displayed prominently throughout the school.
- The proprietor has ensured that all required fire-related checks, such as portable appliance testing, fixed-wiring testing and gas safety, have been carried out in a timely fashion. The school's fire extinguishers were checked in August 2018. The annual fire alarm and emergency lighting tests are booked to take place during the first week in December 2018.
- The proprietor has ensured that the school's fire log book is thorough and up to date. Records show that staff regularly and routinely carry out a suitable range of weekly and monthly checks, such as to be sure that the fire alarm is functioning properly.
- The fire log book shows that fire drills take place on a termly basis. Pupils show good understanding of what to do when the fire alarm rings. All classrooms have push-bar fire doors to the outside. These doors require minimum force and can be opened easily, even by young children. The school's corridors and fire escape routes are kept clear.
- The school meets the independent school standards relating to fire safety. The proprietor has ensured that the school is compliant with the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 (independent school standard 12). The proprietor has also ensured that the building is maintained to a standard such that, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare of pupils are ensured (independent school standard 25).
- The emergency fire inspection found no concerns about fire safety at the school.

Governance

- The proprietor has strengthened the school's governance arrangements since the previous inspection. The proprietor, a very large corporate body, has now appointed a nominated person to liaise between the school and the organisation's headquarters.
- At local level, the proprietor has appointed the senior pastor from its nearby church as the school's head of management, a role similar to that of chair of a governing body. The head of management works closely with the headteacher and knows the school very well. He is increasingly able to hold the school's leaders to account.
- Four advisory boards were set up in September 2018 to support the aims and objectives of the school in particular areas. For example, one advisory board supports education and pupil welfare while another helps with buildings and finance. These arrangements are too new to see their full impact.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- The proprietor and headteacher have ensured that safeguarding has an appropriately high priority. As a result, the school has a strong safeguarding culture, and staff are committed to ensuring that pupils are safe.
- The headteacher has a good understanding of her role as the school's designated safeguarding lead. There is clear evidence that prompt and appropriate action is taken to protect pupils, when necessary.
- Leaders have put appropriate systems in place for dealing with any concerns that arise about pupils' safety and well-being. All staff have had safeguarding training, and this is updated regularly.
- The school's safeguarding policy meets current requirements and is published on its website. It is readily available to parents, meeting the independent school standard 32(1)(c).

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Most staff have undergone training, and achieved qualifications, in the school's chosen approach to teaching. Some staff are currently studying for these qualifications. Leaders ensure that appropriate in-house training is provided for staff where necessary. As a result, the school's chosen method is used consistently throughout the school.
- Teachers provide highly individualised learning for their pupils. As part of the chosen teaching method, teachers and assistants observe pupils' learning frequently, sometimes for extended periods of time. They use their observations to plan teaching opportunities that they feel will best meet pupils' needs and interests. Leaders have found that this helps pupils to make good progress from their individual starting points.
- Lessons, typically, do not involve whole-class teaching. Short, often individual, lessons are given to individual pupils in response to identified needs. Teachers follow a highly prescriptive method of teaching pupils specific tasks, such as counting in tens or hundreds. The clarity with which teachers explain and model concepts enables pupils to understand new learning easily.

- The learning environment is of a consistently high quality throughout the school. Classrooms are clean, bright and welcoming, following the chosen methodology closely. This helps pupils to know what is expected of them. For example, pupils are taught to select a small mat to be their working area when they choose to work on the floor. They quickly learn to do this automatically, ensuring that the classroom space is shared fairly among pupils.
- The school uses a range of learning resources, prescribed by its chosen teaching method. These resources are displayed in a way that makes them readily accessible. Pupils know that they can select and work with any resources related to lessons that they have been taught. Pupils use resources to practise new learning repeatedly so that it becomes deeply understood and so that skills become fully embedded.
- Relationships in classrooms are strong. Teaching staff know their pupils well as individuals. Pupils feel cared for and emotionally safe in their classrooms. They know that staff will give them support with their learning whenever it is needed. This encourages pupils to try new things, helping them to make good progress.
- Leaders and staff have started to develop the school's approach to assessment. They successfully introduced an online assessment tool a year ago, to use with the younger pupils. More recently, they have introduced a second tool that leaders have found is more suitable for the older pupils. Leaders and staff are starting to use these tools to check pupils' progress more effectively.
- Writing is not taught as well as other areas of the curriculum. Teaching staff do not focus strongly on developing pupils' writing skills, such as handwriting, nor do they teach these skills frequently enough. Pupils are not given enough opportunities to write at length so that they build up their writing stamina.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils take responsibility for their own learning. They choose the resources that they want to work with and the skills that they want to practise. Pupils know the importance of putting resources away properly and in the right place, so that they are ready for the next person to use.
- Pupils show great resilience and persistence in their approach to learning. If they initially struggle with something, they do not give up. Pupils concentrate for long periods of time, enabling them to develop deep understanding of the subjects that they learn about.
- Pupils enjoy school. They feel safe, happy and confident at Garden City Montessori. Pupils were keen to talk to inspectors about the school and their work.
- Pupils are taught how to manage risks. For example, pupils are taught how to use knives safely in activities such as preparing fruit for snacks. As with all teaching, teachers use a meticulous, step-by-step approach to teach cutting skills before observing closely as pupils become increasingly adept.
- Pupils are taught about a range of ways to keep themselves safe. For example, staff regularly take pupils on off-site visits, such as to the nearby park. These visits are used as opportunities to start to teach pupils to cross roads safely.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Leaders keep rules to a minimum and expectations high. Pupils know what they are and are not allowed to do. They follow these rules closely. As a result, learning is very rarely interrupted by disruptive behaviour.
- Behaviour support plans are used to good effect. That is, where pupils need help with managing particular aspects of their behaviour, clear plans are put in place and acted on to provide the necessary support. This approach works well.
- Attendance was below average last year. However, leaders work hard to encourage good attendance and are largely successful. Attendance so far this academic year is well above the national average, including for children who are not yet of statutory school age.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- The nature of the school's chosen teaching method means that it does not carry out formal assessments of pupils. There is no assessment information that can be compared with national benchmarks.
- Pupils make good progress from their individual starting points. Pupils often join the school with lower-than-average starting points, having had unsuccessful educational experiences elsewhere. The support they receive enables them to become successful learners quickly.
- Pupils read fluently and well, at a standard appropriate to their age. Some pupils' attainment in reading is particularly advanced. Pupils develop strong comprehension skills.
- Pupils show great interest in the books they read. They understand that books can be used for learning as well as for pleasure. Pupils select and use texts well to find information and to explore the topics that they learn about.
- Pupils develop very good knowledge and understanding of grammar. They are taught very explicitly about matters such as the parts of speech and are given plentiful opportunities to practise their skills and strengthen their understanding. For example, older pupils are able to analyse sentences, identifying the role of each word accurately.
- Pupils make good progress in mathematics. They develop very strong understanding of numbers and how the number system works. Pupils use this knowledge well to solve mathematical problems.
- Pupils also make good progress in a range of other subjects, including history, geography, music, science, design technology and physical education. Pupils develop a good level of knowledge about a wide range of topics. For example, even the very young pupils know the names of the continents and can identify them on a map. They know animals that originate from different continents.
- Pupils make less progress in writing. In some cases, pupils' handwriting is underdeveloped for their age. For example, some pupils use capital letters incorrectly in the middle of words, while others have not developed a fluent, joined style. Some pupils' attainment in writing is lower than it should be.

Early years provision

Good

- The early years provision is led well. Leaders have a good level of knowledge and understanding about how very young children learn. They have ensured that the provision meets the needs of the early years children well. As a result, children make good progress during their time in the early years.
- Teachers observe children at play regularly. They use the information gained from these observations to plan what they will teach each child next. This is done sensitively and thoughtfully, with the needs of the child at the centre of every action taken.
- Children learn how to carry out a range of self-help tasks efficiently. For example, even the youngest children know how to wash their hands and how to lay their place setting at the table when it is time for a snack. They select pieces of fruit sensibly from a serving plate, choosing an appropriately sized portion.
- Children are taught to manage risks safely from the time they join the school. Under close supervision, they learn to carry glass tumblers and china plates safely from the shelf to the table. Even two-year-olds do this routinely and safely.
- The high-quality learning environment supports children's learning well. Furniture is at the right size for children's age, and everything is within easy reach. Appropriate arrangements have been made to meet the needs of the two-year-old children that attend the school. Children enjoy using the wide range of resources that are available.
- Children develop good social skills and follow the school's rules well. They persevere with activities for extended periods of time, even from the youngest age. For example, during the inspection, two-year-old children spent more than half an hour using binoculars to look through the classroom window in search of robins.
- Leaders are mindful that although the school follows a very specific approach to teaching, some parents choose to send their children to maintained schools after they leave the early years. As a result, leaders have actively sought, and have now found, a way to marry the school's own approach to ongoing assessment with the early years foundation stage. Leaders are continuing to develop the school's approach to assessment.
- The proprietor has ensured that the early years statutory requirements are met. All staff that work with early years children have been trained in paediatric first aid.

School details

Unique reference number	142413
DfE registration number	919/6001
Inspection number	10056572

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	31
Number of part-time pupils	2
Proprietor	Elim Foursquare Gospel Alliance
Head of management	Carl Johnston
Headteacher	Sarah Cummins
Annual fees (day pupils)	£2,302 to £9,654
Telephone number	01462 889271
Website	www.montessorigc.com
Email address	info@montessorigc.com
Date of previous inspection	21–23 February 2017

Information about this school

- Governance is provided by four advisory boards, whose members are employees, or are otherwise connected with, Letchworth Garden City Church (LGCC), a subsidiary of the proprietor, and parents. The advisory boards operate under the direction of the head of management, who is the senior pastor of LGCC and an employee of Elim Foursquare Gospel Alliance.
- The school does not have a religious ethos or character.
- The school follows the ethos and teaching methods of Dr Maria Montessori.

- The school was first inspected in February 2017 and its overall effectiveness was judged to require improvement. Two of the independent school standards were not met at that time: paragraph 3, 3(a), 3(d) relating to the quality of education provided, and paragraph 34(1)(a) and 34(1)(b) relating to the quality of leadership and management.
- A progress monitoring inspection was carried out in November 2017 to check the previously unmet standards. All standards checked were met at this inspection.

Information about this inspection

- The DfE commissioned an emergency fire inspection to take place alongside the standard inspection. This was because the proprietor did not respond to the DfE's fire survey, sent to schools in July 2017, following the Grenfell Tower tragedy. The survey asked proprietors of schools to check buildings for cladding and, where appropriate, to arrange for cladding to be tested for the presence of specific, flammable components.
- Inspectors gathered a range of evidence to judge the quality of teaching and learning over time. Both inspectors carried out extended observations in each of the three classrooms, most jointly with the headteacher.
- Inspectors looked at assessment information. They listened to pupils read and talked to them about their work.
- Inspectors looked at a range of the school's documents. They checked the school's single central record of pre-employment checks and other documentation concerned with the safer recruitment of staff.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, other members of staff, the head of management and a group of pupils. The lead inspector spoke with the proprietor's nominated representative on the telephone.
- Inspectors spoke with parents as they brought their children to school. Inspectors considered 10 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, and six free-text comments. Inspectors took account of six responses to the staff survey.

Inspection team

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Her Majesty's Inspector

Paul Copping

Ofsted Inspector

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