

Cobham Montessori School

The Hall, 21–23 Spencer Road, Cobham, Surrey, KT11 2AF

Inspection dates

17 March 2021

Overall outcome

The school is likely to meet all the independent school standards when it opens

Main inspection findings

Part 1. Quality of education provided

Paragraphs 2(1)–2(2)(b), 2(2)(d)–2(2)(d)(ii), 2(2)(h)–2(2)(i), 3–4

- The proposed curriculum policy sets out clear aims based on the Montessori approach to education. Promotion of pupils' personal development is emphasised strongly. The curriculum is to be delivered by teachers, known as 'guides' who will set up a child-centred environment where pupils can learn through 'their own potentials and interests'. All proposed guides are qualified and experienced in Montessori education.
- The central aim of Montessori education is to 'help humans to develop to a state where they wish for a peaceful world'. The main characteristics of the approach are identified as freedom, limits, clear expectations, group work, hard work, talk and care of the environment. For example, pupils will have 'freedom' to choose how they learn and some of the topics that they learn about, the 'limit' is that there are a broad set of expectations as to what pupils should learn over time and that work should be constructive and purposeful.
- The curriculum will be delivered in three mixed-age learning communities: the 'infant community' for children aged two to three; the 'children's house' for children aged three to six; and the 'elementary community' for pupils aged six to 11.
- The early years foundation stage (EYFS) is to be delivered in both the infant community and the children's house. Proposed arrangements for these communities will be based on the proprietor's existing registered early years provision, which was judged outstanding at its previous inspection. The inspector briefly saw pupils learning in these classes during the inspection. Children worked purposefully at various different activities in a calm and stimulating environment. This included a strong focus on developing dexterity, ready for writing.
- The curriculum at each stage is likely to provide the required breadth of experience. In the infant community this is broadly in line with the EYFS, covering language, movement and independence (including communication); physical development; and personal, social and emotional development.
- The children's house will promote growing independence and exploring the world. It is divided into subjects known as practical life; sensorial, language and literacy;

mathematics and culture. 'Culture' includes art, music, the world of plants, the world of animals, geography and history. There is intended to be a strong focus on social and emotional development, including self-control, listening and acceptance of rules. Consequently, the prime and specific areas of the EYFS are likely to be delivered.

- The individualised approach in the children's house provides no false limits on what pupils can learn. The proprietor intends to teach pupils the mechanics of reading, using a phonics approach, when they are ready and in line with nationally-accepted norms. Similarly, there will be a focus on early number and mathematics following the principle that regular practice leads to mastery.
- The elementary curriculum starts with the 'five great lessons' which are considered 'an essential prerequisite in the Montessori Primary'. This is known as a 'cosmic education' approach and is intended to help develop pupils' sense of perspective, to see how everything is connected in the world. The intention is that pupils go on to study the detail of individual components, being able to see where each fits as part of the whole 'cosmic' picture. Earlier elements of the curriculum develop into subjects such as geography, zoology and botany, and build into disciplines such as history. Additions to the Montessori curriculum for the elementary community will include Spanish, physical education (PE) and information technology. PE will be delivered by an external specialist alongside school staff.
- The proposed approach to education means that schemes of work, which set out what pupils will learn and when, do not necessarily look quite the same as they may in other schools. However, individual elements are detailed and precise. In English and mathematics, in particular, there are clear timeframes of when pupils are expected to move through the curriculum, so that they 'do not develop out of step with national norms'. As pupils study each component of the curriculum, they are expected to present their learning to a group or individual. They will have a choice of how to present their understanding, with guides keeping a close eye to make sure that this is varied over time and does not preclude demonstrating knowledge through writing. Guides will check that pupils choose to study the full breadth of the curriculum during their time in school so that they are prepared academically for the next stage of their education.
- Careful observation and assessment of each individual's progress through the curriculum is central to the Montessori approach. The assessment policy states that 'each child's learning is planned and monitored individually' and takes account of factors such as a pupil's 'frame of mind on a particular day'. Pupils learn the curriculum at their own pace, with no lowering of expectations for anyone. This individualised approach is intended to be supportive of all pupils, including pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).
- The Montessori ethos and approach is likely to contribute strongly to pupils' personal development. A personal, social, health and economic education policy is in place which sets out how this aspect of pupils' education will be developed throughout the school. For example, infants will learn about making relationships, and managing their feelings and behaviour. The children's house will develop this further as pupils learn about themselves and their surrounding community, and the elementary class will continue more broadly to explore equalities and societal norms. Leaders intend for pupils' social and emotional development to be considered throughout their education.

Age-appropriate plans are in place to ensure that particular regard is paid to the protected characteristics set out in The Equality Act 2010, including ensuring that reading books reflect diversity, teaching about migration and exploring discrimination. The proprietor intends to use current issues in the news and national celebrations and events to support this aspect of pupils' education. There is nothing in the proposals likely to undermine fundamental British values.

- The standards in this part are likely to be met.

Part 2. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

Paragraph 5–5(d)(iii)

- The proprietor sees pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development as central to the Montessori aim of developing human beings who wish for 'peace'. She intends for this ethos to drive the intended school.
- The curriculum is designed to promote 'informed and mature self-direction, enlightened curiosity (and) emotional well-being based on an understanding of how the world has come to its present state, confidence in an ability to contribute to the world positively and the initiative to do so'.
- The proprietor can outline carefully considered plans of how the school intends to work towards these goals. Pupils will learn about British institutions and services through visiting them and using them. This is part of the intended school's commitment to 'going out' into the community to aid learning. Pupils will learn about democratic processes through making choices and rules for their own classes and communities. Through the 'cosmic education' pupils will learn about the constraints and responsibility that exist in an interconnected society. There will be a strong focus on 'gratitude' for the people and services that make the world we live in work well.
- The curriculum is likely to develop pupils' knowledge and understanding as pupils learn the different components that make up the 'cosmic education'. For example, as pupils learn about different parts of the world they will learn about the different faiths and cultural practices of the humans who live there. They will ponder 'what if' questions and explore British traditions through the history curriculum and through assemblies and class discussions. Diverse subjects such as art, music, Mandarin and yoga are likely to broaden pupils' experiences.
- The standard in this part is likely to be met.

Part 3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils

Paragraph 7–7(b)

- The proprietor has appointed a member of staff to be the designated safeguarding lead (DSL). The proprietor is deputy DSL. Both are trained to the appropriate level.
- The proprietor has been trained in safer recruitment and has ensured that all requirements for the checks of the suitability of staff are likely to be met.
- The safeguarding policy has been written in line with the relevant government legislation and guidance. It prioritises an 'it could happen here' approach. It sets out clearly that staff will be trained in safeguarding and what staff should do if they have a concern about a pupil. The policy recognises the difficulty that very young children and those with SEND can have in disclosing a concern. There is helpful guidance on

the types of abuse and indicators of abuse that staff should be aware of. Whistle-blowing procedures are clear. The proprietor intends for staff to use weekly meetings and supervision time to provide extra training and checking on staff's safeguarding knowledge.

- Safeguarding records are kept securely. The proprietor explained how she intends for staff to record concerns. She understands the need to record a clear chronology of concerns and actions and to keep each file in an organised and tidy fashion.
- There are to be meetings scheduled between the DSL and proprietor to regularly monitor behaviour and safeguarding records to check for patterns of behaviour that might indicate a larger concern, and to check that appropriate action has been taken where necessary to protect a child. Additional checks on the proposed school's safeguarding procedures are to be carried out by an external consultant with safeguarding expertise.
- During the inspection, the proprietor emphasised her commitment to safeguarding and determination to guard against any complacency in a small, close-knit community. Rightly, the safeguarding policy is very clear that concerns about children will be taken seriously, and that relevant external agencies will be informed of any safeguarding issues as required by government legislation and guidance.

Paragraphs 9–10

- The behaviour policy sets out in detail the rationale and underpinning principles for promoting positive behaviour, following the Montessori approach. The policy deals extensively with the complex factors which may cause and contribute to poor behaviour, which the proprietor believes are strongly linked to environmental or developmental factors. Approaches reflect this, through a focus on redirection, resolution and discussion.
- The policy does set out some of the sanctions that will be employed in the proposed school, including 'restricting freedoms' in acceptable ways, for example not being able to work in a separate area, or increasing the amount of adult-directed choice.
- The anti-bullying policy links clearly with the behaviour policy and is influenced strongly by the school's ethos. It contains a clear statement showing that having a protected characteristic can make pupils more vulnerable to bullying. As with managing behaviour, the policy focuses on prevention.
- The proprietor understands the requirement to keep records of sanctions for serious misbehaviour. Proposed actions include creating a behaviour support plan to help the pupil improve their behaviour. Both the behaviour and anti-bullying policy set out clearly that the proprietor reserves the right to exclude pupils in extreme circumstances. The anti-bullying policy also notes that a formal warning or suspension are actions which the proprietor might use before the decision to exclude. She recognises the need to add these measures into the behaviour policy so that both are consistent with each other.

Paragraphs 11–16(b)

- Policies for health and safety, first aid, fire safety and risk assessment are all in place and likely to meet requirements if implemented effectively. All staff will be trained as

first aiders, including training in paediatric first aid. There is a lockable medicine cabinet.

- A trained health and safety officer completes the required checks at appropriate intervals on the building, facilities, procedures and fire equipment, for example. In addition, the building manager oversees remedial work on the building and fire equipment as needed.
- The proprietor has ensured that a fire risk assessment is in place. She has informed the fire and rescue service of the change of use of the premises and has confirmation in writing from them that they have completed the checks they need, via telephone interview. The proprietor has worked closely with the building manager to ensure that all fire safety arrangements are likely to meet requirements.
- Proposed staffing arrangements are fit for purpose. The proprietor has thought carefully about where and when staff will be deployed to ensure adequate supervision of pupils.
- The admission and attendance registers are in place and likely to meet requirements. Additional paper-based registers will continue to be used to support fire safety requirements.

Part 4. Suitability of staff, supply staff, and proprietors

Paragraphs 18(2)–18(3), 19(2)–19(3), 20(6)–20(6)(c), 21(1)–21(7)(b)

- The proprietor has completed safer recruitment training. She is very aware of the checks that need to be made on adults working with children in regulated activities. The proprietor understands the checks that are required of volunteers, supply staff and anybody involved in the leadership and management of the school.
- The single central register is already set up and maintained by the proprietor. The checks recorded on the single central register include identification checks, medical fitness, right to work in the United Kingdom, barred list check and checks on relevant qualifications.
- All the requirements of this part of the independent school standards are likely to be met.

Part 5. Premises of and accommodation at schools

Paragraphs 23(1)–23(1)(c), 24(1)–24(1)(b), 25–29(1)(b)

- The proprietor describes the proposed school as a 'pack-away school' because the premises is also used by the Girl Guides and for yoga or Pilates classes. The premises consist of two large halls which can be separated or joined using partition doors as required. The infant community and children's house will use one hall, the elementary class the other. The inspector saw the early years provision set up and in use in one space, and checked how the elementary class space would be used. This showed that the spaces are of adequate size to accommodate the proposed 35 pupils.
- There is another 'general purpose' room which will be used as office space and meeting room, and will be available for the medical examination and treatment of pupils and for their short-term care if sick or injured. The room contains a water supply that has warm and cold running water. It is close to a toilet. The proprietor has

purchased a privacy screen for the room which will allow for nappy changing to take place in a suitably private designated area.

- There are two kitchen spaces which will allow for food technology lessons to be delivered. The sinks in the kitchens contain taps for drinking water. These are labelled as such.
- Lighting, heating and acoustics are suitable for the pupils likely to be attending the school. There is outdoor lighting so that pupils and visitors are able to enter and leave the school safely when it is dark. There is emergency lighting in place in the event of a fire.
- There are sufficient toilets and washing facilities for pupils and adults, including an accessible toilet. All facilities have hot and cold water supplies. The hot water is of a suitable temperature to prevent scalding.
- Outdoor areas are suitable for play for all pupils, and other physical activity that is part of the curriculum for children and younger pupils. The proprietor proposes to take older pupils to larger public space off site for PE.
- It is likely that the requirements of this part will be met.

Part 6. Provision of information

Paragraph 32(1)–32(1)(d), 32(1)(f)–32(1)(j), 32(2)–32(4)(c)

- The proprietor is familiar with information that the school will be required to publish on its website and make available to parents. This includes the requirement to publish inspection reports, and to produce an annual written report for parents.
- The proprietor is also aware of the requirement to provide specified information to local authorities. She has experience of communicating with local authorities, including when there are safeguarding concerns and to ensure appropriate provision for children with SEND.
- The proprietor intends that policies will be available to parents through the website. These are in place and ready to be published upon registration. The website contains the contact details of the school and the proprietor.
- The requirements of this part are likely to be met.

Part 7. Manner in which complaints are handled

Paragraph 33(a)–33(k)

- The complaints policy is compliant and available on the proposed school's website. The headteacher knows to keep copies of complaints information to be available for inspection on the school premises.
- The complaints policy sets out clear timescales for the management of a complaint.
- The policy allows for complaints to be dealt with on an informal basis initially, before being escalated to a formal process. There is provision for a panel hearing of three people not involved in the complaint, one of which will be independent to the management and running of the school.
- The policy allows for the complainant to be accompanied a panel hearing.

- The policy makes it clear that any findings or recommendations of a panel hearing must be available to the complainant and may be made available to the person complained about.
- The school is not yet operating and therefore there have been no complaints made against the school in the last academic year.
- The requirements of this part are likely to be met.

Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

Paragraph 34(1)–34(1)(c)

- The proprietor has spent time studying the standards and associated requirements when making plans for the proposed school. She has reflected strongly on the judgments made at the previous pre-registration inspection, and acted convincingly to make improvements to policies and intended practice for this proposed school. She is determined that her proposed school continues to meet the independent school standards over time, and consequently, since the previous pre-registration inspection, has made significant changes to the leadership structure of the intended school.
- The proprietor is mindful of the small size of the proposed school and the number of staff. Her staffing structure includes delegated leadership roles for health and safety, SEND provision and safeguarding. Leaders have been trained in their roles and duties. The special educational needs coordinator is being trained currently. In addition, an external consultant has been employed to provide independent oversight and advice to support the strategic running of the school.
- The proprietor has taken advice from an external consultant to make sure that policies and intended practices meet required legislation and guidance and will support the efficient and safe running of the intended school. Policies reflect the context and nature of the intended school.
- The proprietor has existing links with other Montessori schools which she anticipates will bring further helpful advice and support in the future. The proprietor reports enjoying strong relationships with local primary schools, enabling the sharing of good practice. She also proposes to continue to draw on the local authority for advice on safeguarding, SEND and early years.
- The well-being of pupils is central to the Montessori ethos of this intended school. This is reflected consistently well throughout the different school policies, plans and proposals.
- The standard in this part is likely to be met.

Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010

- The proprietor has produced an accessibility plan that sets out appropriate steps needed to improve access to information, the curriculum and the physical environment.

Statutory requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage

- The proprietor and staff are highly experienced in working with children at this age. The learning and development requirements, and safeguarding and welfare requirements of the EYFS are likely to be met.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

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

Proposed school details

Unique reference number	148324
DfE registration number	936/6048
Inspection number	10181255

This inspection was carried out under section 99 of the Education and Skills Act 2008, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's likely compliance with the independent school standards that are required for registration as an independent school.

Type of school	Montessori
School status	Independent school
Proprietor	Cobham Montessori School Limited
Chair	Yvonne Cooke
Headteacher	Yvonne Cooke
Annual fees (day pupils)	£2,000–£9,000
Telephone number	07767 617980
Website	www.cobhammontessori.co.uk
Email address	office@cobhammontessori.co.uk
Date of previous standard inspection	Not previously inspected

Provider already operating

Number of pupils of compulsory school age	3
Number of pupils of compulsory school age for whom a statement is maintained under section 324, or who is looked after by a local authority	0
Total hours operating as a school per week	16 hours 15 minutes
Total hours of teaching provided per week	15 hours

Pupils

	School's current position	School's proposal	Inspector's recommendation
Age range of pupils	2–5	2–11	2–11
Number of pupils on the school roll	20	35	35

- The school's 'current position' figures are based on the existing registered early years provision run by the proprietor.
- The 'proposal' and 'recommendation' figures are the suggested capacity of the building, taking account of the intended operation. Attendance of part-time pupils below compulsory school age at different sessions could push the actual number on roll higher while maintaining the proposed capacity of 35.

Pupils

	School's current position	School's proposal
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Mixed
Number of full-time pupils of compulsory school age	3	18
Number of part-time pupils	16	17
Number of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities	2	Up to 35
Of which, number of pupils with an education, health and care plan	0	Up to 2
Of which, number of pupils paid for by a local authority with an education, health and care plan	0	Up to 2

Staff

	School's current position	School's proposal
Number of full-time equivalent teaching staff	4	5
Number of part-time teaching staff	1	1

Information about this proposed school

- The proprietor currently runs a registered early years provision under the registration EY461173. Once registered as an independent school, she intends to cease the early years registration. She reports that the two provisions will not run concurrently.
- The proposed school will occupy the Girl Guides halls at the end of a residential street. The proposed school has sole occupancy of the halls from 8am until 4pm on weekdays. In the evenings, the premises are sometimes used by other organisations. The premises are currently also used for the proprietor's registered early years provision.
- A residential flat above part of the school premises is privately owned and the direct internal access to the premises occupied by the school is kept locked from the proposed school side. The flat has its own external access and does not share outside space with the proposed school.
- The school does not intend to operate from any other premises, although will use community space for aspects of the curriculum.
- The intention is to offer an 'authentic' Montessori approach to education. It will cater for pupils with SEND, but not exclusively.
- The proprietor does not propose to operate any childcare but will admit children from the age of two to its infant community.
- The school will not have a religious character.

Information about this inspection

- This inspection was commissioned by the Department for Education (DfE) during the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic. Some of the inspection was conducted remotely.
- The purpose of the inspection was to check whether the school is likely to meet the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, if the DfE decides to register it. It was the school's second pre-registration inspection. The first pre-registration inspection took place on 30 July 2020.
- Since September 2020, the proprietor has kept three existing pupils on roll in the children's house who have reached compulsory school age. She states that the provision for these children does not meet the definition of an independent school as there are fewer than five pupils of compulsory school age, none of whom has an education, health and care (EHC) plan or is looked after by a local authority.
- In advance of registering as an independent school, the proprietor is also currently providing part-time Montessori tuition to a group of seven elementary-aged children in support of families who have elected to home school their children. She reports that provision for these pupils only operates for 16 and a quarter hours per week, offering no more than 15 hours' teaching time.
- Children learning in the early years provision were briefly observed while the inspector toured the premises.
- Off-site, the inspector scrutinised the documents submitted to the DfE by the proprietor as part of her application. The inspector also reviewed other documents and records sent electronically once the inspection was announced.
- On-site, the inspector held discussions with the proprietor about her plans for the new school. The proprietor and a member of staff who is the health and safety representative took the inspector on a tour of the premises. The inspector also scrutinised further documentation and records provided by the proprietor as evidence towards the standards. The inspector briefly reviewed some work produced by pupils currently receiving part-time Montessori tuition.

Inspection team

Catherine Old, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

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