

# Inspection of St Helens Montessori School

Lower Road, East Farleigh, Maidstone ME15 0JT

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Inspection dates: 6 to 8 July 2021

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## **Overall effectiveness**

**Good**

The quality of education

**Good**

Behaviour and attitudes

**Outstanding**

Personal development

**Good**

Leadership and management

**Good**

Early years provision

**Outstanding**

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Inadequate

Does the school meet the independent school standards?

**Yes**

## **What is it like to attend this school?**

Pupils thrive and flourish at St Helens Montessori School. They grow in confidence and independence. Attendance is very high because pupils enjoy coming to school. They enjoy the family atmosphere and, as one young pupil told us, they are 'surrounded by kindness'.

Pupils know that staff have high expectations and want them to do well. They know who to turn to if they are having a difficult time. Parents and carers are extremely positive about the school.

The school follows the Montessori curriculum. Teacher presentations and suitable workbooks further engage, enthuse and encourage pupils. The extensive grounds offer a wealth of curriculum opportunities, including gardening, looking after the hens and making chocolate mud pies.

The standard of work in mathematics and humanities is exceptionally high. Pupils relish reading and enthusiastically talk about the books they have read. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are very well supported.

The school prepares pupils very well for the next stage of their education. Pupils say they feel safe, and they are safe. Behaviour and attitudes are excellent. Pupils have many opportunities to learn about British and Christian values. Prayers in the morning assembly encourage them to think about other people.

## **What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?**

The curriculum is ambitious and supplemented by rich resources and additional workbooks. Intentions are clear and end points well defined. Schemes of work have been carefully cross-referenced to the national curriculum. Teachers regularly check pupils' progress and effectively correct misunderstandings. Upper primary pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education.

Reading is extremely important in the school. Teachers ensure that children get off to a prompt start. Phonics and reading progression are systematically developed. Pupils with SEND are quickly identified and individual provision offered. Teachers successfully encourage a love of reading. Pupils have a rich and varied reading diet.

The well-planned curriculums in mathematics and humanities are coherent and coordinated. These subjects make valuable use of the school environment so that learning is meaningful and memorable. In personal, social and health education (PSHE), the curriculum intent is clear. However, planning books do not systematically build knowledge across different years or by areas of focus. As a result, PSHE lacks coherence and some elements, such as learning about different faiths, lack depth. Pupils spoke confidently about Christianity but had difficulty recalling other faiths or religious celebrations other than St Patrick's Day.

The curriculum in the nursery is aspirational. A focus on early mathematics and early literacy helps children get off to a secure start. Children relish new words and take great pleasure in saying and using them. There is a focus on developing independence in the nursery. Staff take every opportunity to introduce children to a wide range of cultures, so children develop a fascination with the world. Children play together with joy and enthusiasm. They behave well and are excited to learn.

Pupils' behaviour and attitudes are impeccable. An ethos of 'grace, etiquette and manners' permeates every aspect of school life. Pupils demonstrate an obvious delight in learning and a constant sense of awe and wonder. They support and show kindness to one another. They agree that bullying is not a problem and the vast majority say that it does not happen. Attendance rates are very high. In morning assembly, pupils' prayers are thoughtful. They reflect on issues such as coronavirus, plastic pollution of the oceans and old people being scammed.

Pupils are prepared well for life in modern Britain and have a secure sense of fundamental British and Christian values. They show respect and tolerance for one another. They have a growing understanding of different cultures and different family backgrounds. Their knowledge and experiences of other faiths is less evident. The curriculum provides opportunities for pupils' understanding of how to stay safe and healthy. Emphasis is given to pupils' physical and mental health. The school offers a wide range of opportunities to develop their talents and interests. These include sport, chess, music, art, drama, botany and zoology.

The headteacher, who is also the proprietor, has a clear vision for the school, and is committed to providing a high-quality education for all pupils. She works well with teachers and supports them with their workloads. Leaders have ensured that the school meets all of the independent school standards. Safeguarding is better managed, and a copy of the safeguarding policy is available on the website. The school complies with schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010. Further work is needed in terms of record-keeping and improvement planning. Leaders know their school well, but record-keeping is brief, and planning does not allow weaknesses to be systematically identified and addressed. A School Advisory Board (SAB) has recently been convened to provide support and challenge to leaders in these areas.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Staff are vigilant and take their safeguarding responsibilities very seriously. They receive regular training and have completed online safeguarding courses, including e-safety, prevent training and child sexual exploitation. The designated safeguarding lead is appropriately trained.

Appropriate checks are carried out on all adults who work at the school, and leaders added a few details to the school's record of checks during the inspection. These changes brought these documents up to date with the latest government requirements.

## **What does the school need to do to improve?**

### **(Information for the school and proprietor)**

- The curriculum content in PSHE is not sufficiently sequenced or coherently planned. This means that pupils have gaps in their knowledge and do not achieve as well as they could. Leaders need to make sure the curriculum in PSHE sets out the content pupils will learn and the order in which they will learn this.
- School leaders' record-keeping and improvement planning is not as precise as it could be. As a result, record-keeping does not allow analysis to take place or improvements to be planned effectively. Leaders need to ensure that record-keeping is more robust and planning for school improvement is more rigorous.

## **How can I feed back my views?**

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use Ofsted Parent View information when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

If you are the provider and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

## School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	131567
<b>DfE registration number</b>	886/6113
<b>Local authority</b>	Kent
<b>Inspection number</b>	10193099
<b>Type of school</b>	Other independent school
<b>School category</b>	Independent school
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	2 to 12
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	50
<b>Number of part-time pupils</b>	26
<b>Proprietor</b>	Jeannelle Dening Smitherman
<b>Headteacher</b>	Jeannelle Dening Smitherman
<b>Annual fees (day pupils)</b>	£7,500
<b>Telephone number</b>	01622 721 731
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.sthelensmontessori.co.uk">www.sthelensmontessori.co.uk</a>
<b>Email address</b>	<a href="mailto:office@sthelensmontessori.co.uk">office@sthelensmontessori.co.uk</a>
<b>Dates of previous inspection</b>	6 to 8 November 2018

## Information about this school

- St Helens Montessori School is a co-educational independent school offering education for pupils aged two to 12 years old. The nursery school opened in 1989 and the primary school opened in April 2006. The school follows the Montessori curriculum, enhanced with pupil workbooks and teacher presentations. The school is a Christian school but welcomes pupils of all faiths.
- The school is registered for 130 pupils, but at the time of the inspection there were 50 pupils on roll. There were 17 pupils in the primary school and 33 children in the nursery school. 26 children were enrolled on a part-time basis. The school was last inspected in November 2018, when its overall effectiveness was judged to be inadequate.
- The proprietor, who is also the headteacher, provides the governance for the school. A School Advisory Board (SAB) has been recently convened to offer scrutiny and support to the school. There are two pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities but no pupils with an education, health and care plan. The school operates on a single site and does not use any alternative provision.
- The school is an approved provider of up to 30 hours free early years education funding.

## Information about this inspection

We carried out this inspection under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008. The purpose of the inspection is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

The school meets the independent school standards. These are the requirements set out in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

- During this inspection, inspectors carried out deep dives in reading, mathematics, humanities and PSHE. This involved meeting with leaders of those subjects, visiting lessons, looking at pupils' work and talking to pupils and staff about learning in these subjects.
- Inspectors met with the proprietor/headteacher and other staff. They reviewed documentation and actions taken to safeguard pupils and promote their welfare, health and safety. They undertook a tour of the school and looked at curriculum documents, school policies, safeguarding documents, risk assessments and employment checks, including the single central record. The lead inspector checked the school's compliance with the independent school standards and had telephone calls with two members of the recently convened SAB.
- Inspectors considered 31 responses to the Ofsted online questionnaire, Parent View, and a further 26 written responses from parents. Inspectors also considered the survey responses from 10 members of staff and 25 pupils.

- This inspection was undertaken during the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic. Inspectors conducted an on-site visit, and all activities were completed in a way that maintained social distancing.

### **Inspection team**

Paul Metcalf, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Deborah Gordon

Ofsted Inspector

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