

Inspection of Brighton & Hove Montessori School

67 Stanford Avenue, Brighton BN1 6FB

Inspection dates: 19 to 21 October 2021

Overall effectiveness

Inadequate

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Good

Personal development

Good

Leadership and management

Inadequate

Early years provision

Requires improvement

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Good

Does the school meet the independent school standards?

No

What is it like to attend this school?

The experience of pupils is varied. Older pupils are carefully guided and encouraged to secure their learning across a wide range of subjects. They learn to make connections with what they know already, gaining satisfaction in deepening their knowledge. Those who join the class needing to improve their reading are helped effectively.

Younger pupils enjoy exploring the resources on offer but are not supported to develop their knowledge effectively. This is particularly the case with reading, where staff expectations of what children can do are low.

Staff are kind and pupils are happy. Pupils feel that they are in a caring community where people look out for each other and support each other's wider development. They are adamant that there is no bullying or mean behaviour because they are taught to be inclusive and considerate. They are not aware that some staff have a poor knowledge of safeguarding procedures.

The school's values of 'respect for self, for others and for the environment' are held proudly by pupils. They are courteous and welcoming to visitors. Older pupils, in particular, work hard to make sure that all are included in activities. They understand that everyone needs a little extra support at times.

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

Leaders do not have a good enough knowledge of what is happening in the school, particularly in the Children's House. Basic processes, including those relating to safeguarding, and a range of independent school standards (the standards) have not been maintained. The two classes are organised very differently and are not equally ambitious for pupils.

Pupils in the Elementary Group are supported well by high expectations and careful planning that is based on what they already know and what they need to know next. These pupils benefit from an ambitious curriculum that provides them with depth of knowledge and a thirst for more. For example, when discussing their earlier biology lesson, pupils realised that the nouns 'genus' and 'genius' appeared to be similar and decided to look them up their etymology. Pupils are encouraged and supported to delve into ideas to help build their knowledge. However, staff keep a close eye on the purpose of activities and ensure that they remain meaningful. They assess what pupils have learned and move them on when they are ready.

This is very different in the Children's House. Staff welcome and encourage children to learn the Montessori routines and use the resources, but there is a lack of ambition. Staff do not have a secure understanding of what children can already do. For example, a parent told an inspector that her child already knew his multiplication tables. The staff did not know if this was the case because they had not started checking what children already knew and could do. Leaders had not considered this

statutory requirement of the early years foundation stage until asked about it during the inspection.

The lack of ambition is also seen with reading. Staff in the Children's House have not promoted learning to read. They did not realise that many of the books matched to the sounds children learn were in the Elementary Group and had been for a long time. Consequently, children have been hindered in their learning to read. Leaders did not know that these resources were not being used as intended until the inspection.

Reading is a strength in the Elementary Group. Some pupils arrive from the Children's House and other schools with weak reading skills. Leaders suspect this is to do with their missing schooling during the COVID-19 pandemic. Staff in the Elementary Group skilfully help pupils to catch up and find a new love of books and stories. These and other pupils were keen to discuss the books they are reading. They enjoy the class trips to the local library to discover and borrow new texts to read.

Staff across the school know pupils well. They take account of any special educational needs and/or disabilities they might have. They ensure that all are included in all activities. Pupils are helped to understand that people have strengths and areas where they need more support. The culture of inclusivity is strong and pupils are, rightly, proud of being part of a caring community where diversity is celebrated.

The curriculum for all pupils is thoughtfully extended beyond the academic. The focus on respect is fundamental to all interactions. From the word go, even the youngest pupils are reminded to respect others. They are taught to ask if they may join in with an activity or give someone a hug, and they learn that a refusal must be respected. This earliest teaching about what older pupils learn about 'consent' is woven through the curriculum, as set out in the school's policy for the teaching of relationships, health and sex education. However, leaders did not consult with parents regarding this policy, as per requirements.

Pupils are helped to reflect on their own perspective on life and to consider alternative views. They discuss these thoughtfully and are clear that there is a point when an opinion is not acceptable. In these cases, they are confident that staff will always listen and take any appropriate action. Older pupils learn about the wide range of cultural influences that have shaped their lives and the lives of others. They have a growing understanding of Britain's democratic system and current issues facing the world, such as environmental concerns.

All pupils display very positive attitudes to school and the opportunities it gives them. They are keen to do well and follow the calm routines sensibly and with interest. They understand what is expected of them and feel safe as part of this community. Parents are similarly positive, many commenting on the difference the school has made to their child's self-esteem and interest in learning. However, these

stakeholders do not realise that leaders have not followed important processes to ensure the welfare, health and safety of pupils.

Leadership is muddled and key actions have not been taken. Improvements and actions taken following the December 2019 inspection have not been maintained or followed up. At that inspection, leaders reported that they had started the process of forming a governing body. They did not continue this work and point to the pandemic as the block to this. Leaders did attend leadership training and say that it was useful. However, they have not provided leadership for staff in the Children's House in terms of setting ambition and making sure that statutory processes are followed.

Leaders have not ensured that all staff understand their roles and what is expected of them. During the inspection, leaders changed various policies such as the complaints policy, and made sure that staff knew basic safeguarding processes. Leaders commented that there were 'quick fixes' that would enable them to meet the standards easily. They feel the pandemic threw them off track. However, these standards are an ongoing requirement, not just a part of inspection.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are not effective.

Staff safeguarding knowledge is poor. All staff have completed online safeguarding training, but leaders have not checked their learning from this or helped them to understand how to apply it to the specific context of the school. School documentation is contradictory, and some staff did not know who the designated safeguarding lead is.

Leaders have not followed statutory safeguarding guidance. For example, leaders had not conducted risk assessments for parent volunteers or checked that they understood their role in safeguarding pupils. Until the inspection, some required recruitment checks for staff were not completed.

Leaders have not reviewed incidents of restrictive physical intervention so have no understanding of common antecedents or checked on pupils and staff after these events.

Staff know pupils well and leaders have made appropriate and useful referrals to external services when necessary.

What does the school need to do to improve? (Information for the school and proprietor)

- Leaders' knowledge of statutory safeguarding requirements is not secure. At the start of the inspection, they had not undertaken all the required checks for adults working at the school. They had not considered risk assessments needed to manage volunteers working on the school site. This potentially puts pupils at risk.

Leaders must ensure that these requirements are considered by all at the school so that they are met consistently.

- Staff did not know who the designated safeguarding lead is. This means that the agreed safeguarding processes could not be followed. While this was corrected during the inspection, leaders need to ensure that all staff have secure knowledge and understanding of safeguarding roles, responsibilities and processes.
- Staff knowledge of the recent safeguarding updates is poor. They have not considered the implications of this information for pupils at the school. Some staff do not know their duties to protect pupils from radicalisation and extremism. Consequentially, staff do not have the knowledge to look out for potential risks of harm to pupils. Leaders need to ensure that all staff are alert to potential risks to pupils and understand how statutory guidance must be applied to the school.
- There is no oversight or systematic process to review the use of restrictive physical interventions. While these infrequent restrictions are logged and communicated to parents, there is no discussion about triggers or how they might be prevented in the future. This puts staff and pupils at risk. This needs to be considered as a matter of urgency.
- There is a sense of confusion regarding leadership at the school. Leaders are in a period of transition and some roles are changing. Staff in the Children's House have not had the leadership they need and they lack ambition for children. Assessments to check what children can do already were not done until the inspector asked about them. Consequently, some children are not making the progress they should, especially with their reading. Leaders need to address this confusion and ensure that the quality of provision is as they intend at all times.
- The proprietor does not have systems in place to ensure that the independent school standards are met consistently. She has not maintained improvements or actioned the plans noted in the December 2019 progress monitoring inspection. She has not acted on recent statutory updates. She needs to establish a process by which she can be assured that all of the standards are met all of the time.
- The school does not meet the learning and development requirements of the early years foundation stage. Staff did not think about conducting baseline assessments until they were asked about them during the inspection. Leaders must ensure these requirements are met.

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 information from Ofsted Parent View 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

Unique reference number	133348
DfE registration number	846/6023
Local authority	Brighton and Hove
Inspection number	10205489
Type of school	Montessori school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	2 to 12
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	30
Number of part-time pupils	11
Proprietor	Daisy Cockburn
Headteacher	Daisy Cockburn
Annual fees (day pupils)	£8,295 to £13,930
Telephone number	01273 702485
Website	www.brighton-montessori.org.uk
Email address	info@brighton-montessori.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	5 to 7 June 2018

Information about this school

- The school is a Montessori mixed day school for pupils between two and a half and 12 years of age. They are split into two groups: the Children's House for children up to age six, and the Elementary Group for pupils of ages six to 12. There are currently 30 pupils on roll.
- The school does not use any alternative provision.
- The headteacher is also the sole proprietor of the school.
- Since the school's most recent standard inspection, in June 2018 when it was judged to be good, it has received two inspections. The first was a request for a material change to increase the school's capacity from 45 to 65 pupils. At this inspection, in May 2019, Ofsted found that standards were unlikely to be met. It also found unmet standards relating to the school's existing operation. These included standards relating to the welfare, health and safety of pupils. An inspector re-inspected the school in December 2019 and found that leaders had taken appropriate action and the standards were met.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors 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 has failed to meet the independent school standards. These are the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation.
- Inspectors held a wide range of meetings during the inspection. These included meetings with the proprietor/headteacher, all school staff and groups of pupils.
- When considering the quality of education, inspectors did deep dives into these subjects: reading, mathematics, science and practical life. For each deep dive, inspectors met with the lead teachers in the Children's House and Elementary Class, looked at curriculum plans, saw lessons in action, spoke to staff, looked at samples of pupils' work and spoke to pupils about their learning.
- Inspectors also looked at curriculum plans and spoke to leaders about learning across the whole curriculum.
- Inspectors evaluated the effectiveness of the safeguarding arrangements in the school by speaking to members of staff, pupils and parents. The lead inspector met with the designated safeguarding lead and the deputy to examine their knowledge, records and actions. During these meetings, she scrutinised records,

including those relating to the safer recruitment of staff. She sampled case files to explore how the school identifies and supports pupils at risk of harm.

- Inspectors took account of the views of parents through consideration of the 14 responses to Ofsted Parent View and accompanying free-text comments. The lead inspector also spoke to a sample of parents to gather their views of the school.
- The views of staff were captured through conversations and scrutiny of the six responses to the online staff survey.
- Inspectors spoke to pupils in class and around the school, and took account of the five responses to the online pupil survey.

Inspection team

Lucy English, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Kathryn Moles

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex. Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school failed to meet the following independent school standards

Part 1. Quality of education provided

- 2A(1) The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor-
 - 2A(1)(f) consults parents of registered pupils at the school before making or revising a statement under sub-paragraph (e), and
 - 2A(1)(g) publishes a copy of the statement on a website and provides a copy of the statement free of charge to anyone who asks for one.

Part 3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils

- 7 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that-
 - 7(a) arrangements are made to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils at the school; and
 - 7(b) such arrangements have regard to any guidance issued by the Secretary of State.
 - 16(a) the welfare of pupils at the school is safeguarded and promoted by the drawing up and effective implementation of a written risk assessment policy; and
 - 16(b) appropriate action is taken to reduce risks that are identified.

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

- 21(3)(a)(iii) a check was made to establish whether S is subject to any direction made under section 128 of the 2008 Act or section 142 of the 2002 Act or any disqualification, prohibition or restriction which takes effect as if contained in such a direction;

Part 7. Manner in which complaints are handled

- 33 The standard about the manner in which complaints are handled is met if the proprietor ensures that a complaints procedure is drawn up and effectively implemented which deals with the handling of complaints from parents of pupils and which-
 - 33(f) where the parent is not satisfied with the response to the complaint made in accordance with sub-paragraph (e), makes provision for a hearing before a panel appointed by or on behalf of the proprietor and consisting of at least three people who were not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint;
 - 33(g) ensures that, where there is a panel hearing of a complaint, one panel member is independent of the management and running of the school;
 - 33(h) allows for a parent to attend and be accompanied at a panel hearing if they wish;
 - 33(i) provides for the panel to make findings and recommendations and stipulates that a copy of those findings and recommendations is-
 - 33(i)(i) provided to the complainant and, where relevant, the person complained about; and

- 33(i)(ii) available for inspection on the school premises by the proprietor and the head teacher;
- 33(j) provides for a written record to be kept of all complaints that are made in accordance with sub-paragraph (e) and-
- 33(j)(i) whether they are resolved following a formal procedure, or proceed to a panel hearing; and
- 33(j)(ii) action taken by the school as a result of those complaints (regardless of whether they are upheld); and

Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

- 34(1) The standard about the quality of leadership and management is met if the proprietor ensures that persons with leadership and management responsibilities at the school-
 - 34(1)(a) demonstrate good skills and knowledge appropriate to their role so that the independent school standards are met consistently;
 - 34(1)(b) fulfil their responsibilities effectively so that the independent school standards are met consistently; and
 - 34(1)(c) actively promote the well-being of pupils.

Early Years Foundation Stage

- Safeguarding and welfare requirements are not met. Leaders have not trained staff to understand policy and practices in terms of the children in their care. Staff were confused as to who the DSL in the school was. They do not know how to follow the school's procedures properly. They did not know what their Prevent duty was (EYFS statutory framework 1 September 2021 paragraphs 3.6 and 3.7).
- Learning and development requirements are not met. Leaders did not consider conducting the required assessment at the start of the reception year until inspectors asked about it. (EYFS statutory framework 1 September 2021 paragraphs 2.7, 2.8 and Annex B).

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