Inspection of Cobham Montessori School

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

Inspection dates: 8 to 10 November 2022

Overall effectiveness	**Good**
The quality of education	**Good**
Behaviour and attitudes	**Good**
Personal development	**Good**
Leadership and management	**Good**
Early years provision	**Good**
Does the school meet the independent school standards?	**Yes**

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils enjoy school and describe this as a 'friendly' and 'welcoming' school. They are safe and are cared for well by staff. The school's Montessori philosophy is reflected in the respectful, nurturing relationships that staff forge with pupils.

Staff provide strong guidance to help pupils develop their social skills and independence. Many younger pupils are remarkably independent. They confidently prepare their morning snacks and help to tidy up afterwards. Pupils are supported to recognise and manage their emotions. They use the 'mood meter' to help them explain how they are feeling.

Respect for others is firmly woven through day-to-day life. Staff work hard to help pupils develop a sense of belonging and to feel part of the community. The occasional upset is dealt with calmly by staff. Unkindness is never tolerated. Most pupils behave sensibly and are motivated to learn. They appreciate the flexibility they have to direct some of their own learning.

All staff want the best for everyone, and most pupils are getting on well. Some parents talk about the positive difference the school has made to their children's lives, such as their self-esteem and confidence.

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

The proprietor has ensured that pupils learn a broad curriculum. This is strongly rooted in the Montessori principles and teaching approaches. Typically, pupils follow individual learning pathways through the curriculum. Leaders have identified the key content that pupils will learn as they progress from early years and onwards. In subjects such as mathematics and phonics, this sets out in fine detail the small steps of knowledge that pupils need to acquire.

All staff have been trained in the school's unique approach. Staff have appropriate subject knowledge. They check how pupils are getting on and have a sound understanding of the knowledge and skills that pupils are acquiring. Staff know what they need to follow up if pupils have not understood key concepts. They identify and understand pupils' needs. This includes the needs of the few pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). The school's personalised approach to the curriculum means that learning is tailored around pupils' starting points and needs. The proprietor liaises with the local authority's SEND team to seek advice for pupils with specific needs.

Staff carry out daily assessments of pupils' engagement with learning. They aim to tap into pupils' interests, ignite their curiosity and get them back on track if they are not engaged. However, not all learning activities are well thought out or contribute well to pupils' learning. This is especially the case in the Elementary Group. This means that sometimes pupils' learning is not secure and not all pupils produce work of a consistently good standard.

Right from the start, there is a strong focus on developing pupils' communication and language. Rhymes, songs and stories feature daily for younger pupils. They start to learn phonics as soon as they are ready to do so. Pupils follow an appropriate programme that starts with learning initial sounds and digraphs. Books are, on the whole, appropriately matched to pupils' reading knowledge. Although most pupils get off to a sound start with reading, a few have been slow to get going. The proprietor has not yet ensured that these pupils receive effective extra support to help them make up for lost ground.

Classrooms are calm and most pupils settle quickly to learning. Pupils understand and follow the well-established routines so that learning carries on with little disturbance. They happily help with organising equipment and resources. Staff guide pupils to make positive choices about their behaviour and learning. They are quick to spot if any pupils need re-directing. Lunchtimes are happy social occasions and most pupils play sensibly.

Staff provide appropriate guidance for the few pupils who need help to regulate their behaviour. Incidents of inappropriate behaviour are recorded and followed up. However, record-keeping is not thorough enough. This means that the proprietor is unable to evaluate how well the support for individual pupils is working or identify any patterns in pupils' behaviour.

Through the curriculum, staff nurture pupils' interests and talents. They make sure that pupils learn about equality, discrimination and the protected characteristics. The proprietor has implemented an appropriate programme for personal, social and health education (PSHE). This reflects the statutory guidance for relationships, health and sex education. Pupils are taught about the importance of their own 'personal space' and to have an age-appropriate understanding of issues such as consent. Older pupils enjoy visits to places in the local area, including their recent visit to a transport museum.

Staff are positive about working at the school. They feel supported by the proprietor and appreciate her ongoing guidance and the training they have received. Parents are full of praise for the school and value the way that staff engage and communicate with them.

The proprietor has sought to strengthen strategic oversight and accountability. To this end, she has put in place a new governing body. The proprietor has appointed governors with a background in education who can bring expertise to the school. Governors have a clear understanding of the key functions of governance and how they will fulfil their roles. However, arrangements are not yet fully established and therefore it is not possible to evaluate the impact of governors' work.

The proprietor has ensured that the school complies with schedule 10 of the Equality Act, that statutory duties are fulfilled and the independent school standards are met.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Staff have received appropriate training to enable them to understand and fulfil their responsibilities. Staff know pupils well and quickly spot anything concerning. The designated safeguarding lead has a sound understanding of the local authority's thresholds of need and when they should involve external agencies. All concerns, however minor, are logged and followed up. The proprietor keeps oversight of safeguarding. She recently commissioned an external review of safeguarding to assure herself that everything was as it should be. The safeguarding policy reflects statutory guidance and is published on the school's website.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and proprietor)

- The proprietor has not ensured that the few pupils who find reading a challenge receive additional effective support. This means that a few pupils are not making strong enough gains in their reading. The proprietor needs to ensure that pupils who need to catch up receive focused, timely support to enable them to become competent, fluent readers.
- Some learning activities are not well designed and do not always contribute well to pupils' academic learning. As a result, learning is sometimes patchy and some pupils' work is not of a consistently good standard, particularly in the Elementary Group. The proprietor needs to ensure that learning activities are consistently purposeful and designed to enable all pupils to achieve consistently well.
- Record-keeping and oversight of behaviour are not strong enough. This means that the proprietor is unable to identify patterns or check how well support is working for the few pupils who need help to regulate their behaviour. The proprietor needs to strengthen this aspect of her work.
- Governance arrangements are new and not yet fully established to enable governors to provide effective strategic oversight, challenge and support. The proprietor needs to implement the school's plans to fully establish governance.

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.

School details

Unique reference number	148324
DfE registration number	936/6048
Local authority	Surrey
Inspection number	10214669
Type of school	Montessori
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	2 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	28
Number of part-time pupils	9
Proprietor	Cobham Montessori School Limited
Headteacher	Yvonne Cooke
Annual fees (day pupils)	£1,980 to £9,525
Telephone number	01932 863397
Website	www.cobhammontessori.co.uk
Email address	office@cobhammontessori.co.uk

Information about this school

- The school was first registered by the Department for Education on 31 March 2021. This is the first standard inspection of this school.
- The school caters for pupils between the ages of two and 11. Pupils are split into two groups: the Children's House for children up to the age of six, and the Elementary Group for pupils between the ages of six and 11. Currently, there are six pupils in the Elementary Group. The large majority of children in the Children's House are in early years.
- The school follows the Montessori principles and practices as set out in the guidance from the Association Montessori Internationale.
- The sole director of the proprietor company, Cobham Montessori School Limited, is also the school's headteacher. The headteacher has a teaching commitment in the Elementary Group.
- The proprietor has recently put in place a governing body which is made up of three governors and the headteacher. The inaugural meeting of the governing body was held on 1 October 2022.
- The school does not currently use any alternative provision.

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 meets the independent school standards. These are the requirements set out in 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. The inspector discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and has taken that into account in her evaluation of the school.
- The inspector carried out deep dives in these subjects: reading, mathematics and PSHE. Deep dives included visiting lessons, looking at pupils' work and meeting with pupils, staff and the proprietor. The inspector also heard some pupils read.
- To inspect safeguarding, the inspector met with the school's designated safeguarding lead. She considered a range of documents, including the school's single central record, and talked with staff and pupils.
- The inspector held meetings with the headteacher and reviewed a wide range of documents, including information about the curriculum.
- The inspector talked with pupils during visits to lessons and at other times of the day. The inspector also held two separate meetings with pupils.

- The inspector took into account parents' responses to the online survey, Ofsted Parent View. The inspector also met with some parents on the second day of the inspection.
- The inspector gathered the views of staff during meetings with them and through their responses to Ofsted's survey.

Inspection team

Sue Cox, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector

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