

Meadowbrook Montessori School

Independent School

Inspection report

DCSF Registration Number	867/6006
Unique Reference Number	110172
Inspection number	322023
Inspection dates	17–18 June 2008
Reporting inspector	Mark Lindfield HMI

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 162A of the Education Act 2002 (as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005).

Inspection of funded nursery education was carried out under Schedule 26 of the School Standards and framework Act 1998.

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Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out by Ofsted under section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005, in order to advise the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

Information about the school

Meadowbrook Montessori School was founded in 1990 by the present proprietor. The primary section of the school is located in a modern building with large grounds close to the village of Warfield, near Bracknell in Berkshire. The pre-primary department, including nursery and reception children, is in a Victorian school building with its own substantial grounds. There are 121 pupils on roll, 63 boys and 58 girls, aged between 3 and 11. Thirty-one of these pupils attend part-time.

The aims of the school include providing pupils with a thirst for knowledge, a love of work and an ability to set high expectations for personal learning and achievement. The school has thorough procedures for monitoring and has a good understanding of its strengths and areas for development.

The school was last inspected as an independent school in March 2004, with a further inspection of early years provision in March 2005.

Evaluation of the school

Meadowbrook Montessori School provides a good quality of education. Curricular provision is good and meets the needs of all pupils. Teaching is good and supports pupils in making good progress. The pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding, as is their behaviour. The quality of pastoral support is good with satisfactory procedures for the pupils' welfare, health and safety. The school meets all but two of the regulatory requirements and has addressed successfully the majority of the areas for improvement in the last report.

Quality of education

Curricular provision is good. It is well balanced, broad and tailored to the needs of pupils. Its foundations derive from Montessori principles and practices which provide the core elements and are allied to the National Curriculum where appropriate. There are detailed education plans for each pupil which are used well by staff to ensure good progress. The curriculum is thoughtfully adapted to meet the needs of pupils of all abilities. The effective development of linking different subjects within a project or topic is a strong aspect of the curriculum. Parents are kept well informed

about the content of these topics through the termly 'rough guides'. Personal, social and emotional development is a real strength of the provision and helps prepare pupils for their future. A parent wrote: 'Meadowbrook produces self-reliant, independent and confident children who are well equipped to deal with life.' Pupils' interpersonal skills are very strongly developed and they regularly participate in group activities. The curriculum is extended by providing pupils with the opportunity to learn to speak French from their entry into pre-primary. They take part in swimming lessons from Reception to Year 6, and have opportunities to play musical instruments in the primary years. The school makes good use of its grounds, has implemented a 'jungle trail' and uses a marquee for performances. There are well-planned visits to places of interest. Learning resources are of good quality across the school and are well organised for independent access by the pupils. Reading resources are organised particularly effectively and parents are able to discuss the choice of suitable books with a knowledgeable member of staff. Good use is made of information and communication technology (ICT) to provide pupils with opportunities to develop their research skills but they do not always have sufficient access to computers.

The quality of teaching and assessment is good. The headteacher sets a clear direction and leads by example within a close staff team. Many teachers promote pupils' thinking very effectively and use open questions well to draw out pupils' responses whilst allowing them time to work out an answer. They make effective links to previous learning and future activities. Some teaching is outstanding, with a particular emphasis on communicating how pupils' work can reach the highest standards, but this is not consistent across the school. Teachers have established excellent working relationships and routines that develop each pupil's ability to work independently to a very high level. Consequently, pupils complete their work conscientiously before moving on to the next task. Teachers observe pupils carefully as they work on the well-structured activities and the school gathers a rich array of assessment data. These assessments are used well to plan future activities and also to agree targets with pupils in a number of areas. These are not always synthesised into a more concise format that can be shared with pupils in order to make the process even more effective. Interesting displays promote the pupils' natural curiosity, such as those on the use of electricity and facts about reptiles. A great strength of the provision is the emphasis upon pupils developing an individual approach to learning and as a result, they make good progress. Pupils who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities also make good progress. In the best practice, pupils are encouraged to evaluate their own work against specific criteria. Their progress over time is good; for example, older pupils' writing and mathematical skills develop to a high standard. Monitoring of teaching and learning is thorough and development areas are identified. Not all staff have specific and appropriate training which links to these areas to improve the quality of teaching and learning across the school.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

Pupils' personal, spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Their social and personal development is a significant strength. Pupils concentrate extremely well on tasks and cooperate with others. They develop excellent independence in their learning and are always ready to show initiative in sessions. Staff's positive feedback and pupils' community meetings contribute significantly to pupils' self-esteem and their feelings that they are valued as unique individuals. Their spiritual development is strong because staff inspire pupils successfully. Singing sessions are used well to promote pupils' well-being. They feel very confident and secure in offering their opinions and praise. This contributes significantly to the development of their good communication skills.

Provision for pupils' moral development is highly effective. This means that they have a deep understanding of what is right and wrong. They have a good understanding of public establishments. Relationships throughout the school are particularly good. One pupil summed up the care they receive when he said, 'they care quite a lot and the teachers are very open.' Pupils' behaviour is outstanding because they are managed and guided very successfully. Visitors promote pupils' awareness of the multicultural nature of society through, for example, presentations about Eid, Diwali and Hanukkah and performances of Korean music. Such experiences allow pupils to demonstrate their significant level of respect for the diversity found in British society. Racial harmony is achieved very successfully.

Pupils' contribution to the community is very good. They have ample opportunities to take on a wide range of responsibilities successfully. Community meetings allow all pupils' ideas and views to be explored effectively. They have good attitudes to learning and their well-developed skills in literacy and numeracy contribute significantly to securing their future economic well-being. Pupils are keen to come to school and their attendance is regular and usually prompt. They enjoy many aspects of school life. For example, pupils like mathematics because of the apparatus and opportunities to explore ideas. There are good links with the local community, together with a wide variety of charitable activities in which the school is involved. Pupils regularly attend the local church and learn effectively about symbolism in the Christian faith and, for example, know what each part of the Christingle represents. Such experiences assist their wider personal development and growth.

Welfare, health and safety of the pupils

Provision to ensure pupils' welfare, health and safety is satisfactory. There is a warm, caring atmosphere in the school and all pupils are looked after well. There are good procedures to assure their safety during emergencies. All staff are trained in first aid and two staff have completed more specific medical response training to support pupils. Fire drills are undertaken regularly and thorough analysis is used to improve safety. Risk assessments are undertaken routinely before out-of-school visits. Pupils feel very safe in school. They can approach staff confidently if they feel

worried. Pupils have a good awareness of being healthy and are encouraged to be physically active, eat healthily and look after each other's emotional well-being. The school's safeguarding procedures are thorough. Staff are updated with the latest safeguarding information and there are identified senior staff and clear written procedures. The school has an appropriate disability discrimination policy and has, in the recent past responded to an individual pupil's needs. The school has increased accessibility and will be drawing up a further plan to review the possibility of further improving access.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

The school meets all of the regulations. All staff have been subject to clearance at an enhanced level with the Criminal Records Bureau to ensure that they are suitable to work with children. References and the medical fitness of staff are checked. The school has an up-to-date single central register to record this information.

School's premises and accommodation

The school does not comply with all the regulations in this standard. It has used the available space in both sites well to provide a good learning environment. There is good outdoor provision and effective use of space for pupils to play and learn, although the adventure play apparatus at both sites is in need of urgent maintenance. This represents a health and safety hazard and does not comply with regulations. The school has a policy on emergency evacuations and staff have designated roles and responsibilities. However, there is insufficient access for emergency vehicles at the primary site, with no clear entry from the school car park to the school building.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

Parents were unanimous in their support for and appreciation of the school. The school works very closely with parents and provides up-to-date information for parents and prospective parents. Regular conferences are held and the school's open and warm welcome ensures that parents feel confident about approaching staff. Graduates from the school are invited to attend functions and contribute to the termly newsletters. Parents receive written reports about their children's progress and have further contact through a range of formal and informal meetings.

Procedures for handling complaints

The school has all suitable policies and procedures in place and these are shared with parents in a comprehensive handbook.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school meets all of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as amended January 2005, with the exception of those listed below.

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of the premises and accommodation (standard 5) and must:

- provide sufficient access so that emergency evacuations can be accomplished safely for all pupils, including those with special needs (paragraph 5(g))
- make appropriate arrangements for providing outside space for pupils to play safely (paragraph 5(t)).

What the school could do to improve further

While not required by the regulations, the school might wish to consider the following points for development:

- the provision of concise and clearly communicated targets that encourage academic progress
- the linking of individual staff development areas to specific and appropriate training
- the clear and consistent communication to pupils of what needs to be included in their work to produce a good outcome.

Inspection of funded nursery education

Effectiveness of the funded nursery education

The provision is outstanding.

The quality of teaching and learning is outstanding. Staff have an excellent knowledge of children's individual development to help them make very good progress and reach their full potential. Staff's interaction with children is exceptional as staff value each child and show interest in what they say and do, asking appropriate questions that encourage children to think independently and communicate their thoughts and feelings. Staff are enthusiastic and committed ensuring that children thrive and excel in the setting. Children's contributions to the setting are highly valued as they confidently convey their thoughts and ideas through weekly community meetings where they actively participate.

Staff use Montessori records and the record of achievement linking to the Foundation Stage curriculum to monitor children's progress. The teachers have a clear understanding of the Foundation Stage curriculum and closely support other staff members. The dedicated team work effectively together to ensure that the next steps in the children's learning are clearly identified and used to inform planning. Children follow their own interests and skilled staff are able to appropriately extend and expand their interests.

Children are eager to come into the setting where they play an active role, they are settled and are engrossed in activities. Children are extremely well behaved; they are polite, courteous and well mannered. They play together co-operatively and are aware of the expected rules of behaviour as they have a clear understanding of taking turns supported by staff who act as positive role models. Children are aware of the expectations within the setting as they clear up after each activity, following the Montessori ethos. Staff and children develop a clear respect for one another where everybody values one another. For example, children are encouraged to develop their understanding of consequences following their actions and possible alternatives and they think about the other people's feelings and how they would feel. Montessori practical life resources encourage children to develop exceptional skills that take care of their personal needs. For example, children practise pouring and then pour their own drinks for snack and cut up their own fruit, they wash up and dry their own plates and cups and ensure they sweep the floor and tables after spillages. Children are confident and independent as they access resources independently and confidently approach adults to show what they can do or share ideas.

Children's progress in communication, language and literacy is highly successful as children develop confidence when speaking as staff listen and value what children have to say. Children develop their competence and confidence as they have

opportunities to speak in a large group at community meetings where they offer their ideas and discuss issues. Children have a wide range of opportunities for mark making, for example, as they write their names on their artwork, take orders in the restaurant in the role play area and freely access pens and paper writing freely. Older children are confident writers. They have regular opportunities to write in their topic books and write their names on their artwork and some children are developing their skills as confident story writers. Children's learning and recognising and writing letters is supported through Montessori formal activities. Children learn to link sounds to letters and phonics are used to promote and develop their understanding. For example, a teacher asks, "Can all those children go to the bathroom whose name starts with a 'ch'?" Older and more able children attempt to write unfamiliar words with most letters formed correctly. Some older and more able children are beginning to read. Children enjoy books and relish stories and freely access both fiction and non-fiction books.

Children learn about number and counting through the extensive Montessori resources. For example, they identify the number on a card and count out the corresponding number of beads. Montessori resources support the identification of shapes and children are highly competent at naming and identifying shapes and relating them to their surrounding environment.

Children learn about features of living things and the world around them as they participate in nature walks, collect insects in bug pots, observe a nesting bird and its young, and plant potatoes and tomatoes in their garden. Children have extensive opportunities to learn about the world around them through an extensive range of resources, including posters and books. Staff develop and extend children's understanding of cultural diversity through topics and geography lessons. They encourage parents who play an active role in sharing their knowledge and expertise with the group. For example, Australian parents enabled children to experience 'Australia Day' when they had the opportunity to play the didgeridoo, identify Australia on maps and discover information on the internet, other parents have shared information and spoken to the children about Diwali and Ramadan.

Specialist staff take children for music and French lessons. Older children participate in gym lessons at the primary department and take weekly swimming lessons at a nearby leisure centre. Children have regular opportunities to be active both indoors as they march to music and outdoors where they have a large area consisting of a hard standing area, grass, climbing equipment and garden. Children's fine manipulative skills are developing exceptionally well as they are competent when selecting and using the Montessori equipment. For example, a three-year-old confidently sews a button onto a piece of material and a child transfers coloured beads from one pot to another using tweezers.

Children benefit from the skills of a dedicated staff team who ensure that the individual needs of each child are met. Teaching is excellent, and activities are differentiated appropriately ensuring that each child reaches their full potential. Staff

complete regular observations which are used to assess children's achievements. These identify the stage of each child's learning and are used to inform the next steps in their learning.

Children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is fostered. Children develop a strong sense of belonging as they play an active role and are highly valued. Children's self esteem is promoted by staff that have high regard for their thoughts and views, and offer appropriate praise and encouragement promoting their self worth as individuals. The setting has good support for children with learning difficulties or disabilities and actively promotes inclusion and the meeting of individual needs in all areas. Staff are committed to include all children and adapt activities and topics to meet individual needs.

The partnership with parents and carers is outstanding. Staff build positive relationships with parents; they gather information about the child prior to the child starting to ensure they meet individual needs. Parents are kept up to date with regular discussions, parents' evenings, reports and the completion of the Foundation Stage profile. Parents are invited to meetings when the Foundation Stage curriculum and Montessori are discussed and parents can experience how resources are used and how children learn, supporting their understanding of the education in the setting. The setting provides excellent communication through a parents' notice board, newsletters, a prospectus and parent link group. Parents are encouraged to play an active role in their child's learning and children take books and words home and parents are involved in planning the next steps in learning through regular discussions and parents' evenings.

Leadership and management are outstanding. The setting meets the needs of the range of children for whom it provides. Staff are motivated, enthusiastic and work effectively as a team as they have regular staff meetings, planning meetings and undertake further training to enhance their skills. Management have an excellent support system in place where regular appraisals are carried out. The management team are excellent role models, sharing their expertise and knowledge through example, by monitoring and supporting staff. As part of the setting's evaluation children are involved in discussions through the community meeting where any issues and concerns are actively listened to. Regular meetings and thorough monitoring of children's development ensure that all children are continually making rapid progress meeting their full potential, and outcomes for children are excellent.

School details

Name of school	Meadowbrook Montessori School
DCSF number	867/6006
Unique reference number	110172
Unique reference number (funded nursery education)	EY 291098
Type of school	Montessori school
Status	Independent
Date school opened	1990
Age range of pupils	2-11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 46 Girls: 44 Total: 90
Number on roll (part-time pupils)	Boys: 17 Girls: 14 Total: 31
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need	Boys: 2 Girls: 0 Total: 2
Number of children receiving funded nursery education	Boys: 16 Girls: 12 Total: 28
Annual fees (day pupils)	£6,555-£7,320
Address of school	Malt Hill Warfield Bracknell Berkshire RG42 6JQ
Telephone number	01344 890869
Fax number	01344 890869
Email address	administrator@meadowbrookmontessori.org
Headteacher	Mrs Serena Gunn
Proprietor	Mr Paul Watkins
Reporting inspector	Mark Lindfield HMI
Childcare inspector	Mandy Gannon CCI
Dates of inspection	17–18 June 2008