

Maple House School

Independent school inspection report

DCSF registration number 306/6090
Unique reference number 131770
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Reporting inspector Linda Kelsey HMI

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as amended.

Age group: 3–11

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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, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.¹

Information about the school

This small co-educational school in Thornton Heath, South London provides for 104 pupils aged 3–11 and over a third of its children are funded under the nursery scheme. The school aims to provide a safe and appealing environment where children may develop their social, practical and intellectual skills according to Montessori principles.

There is a mix of ethnic and religious backgrounds, the majority of pupils coming from a Black or Black British Caribbean background and the second largest group being British or Indian Asian. Three pupils do not have English as their principal language and currently there are no pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

At the time of the last inspection in February 2007, the school was judged to be satisfactory and was asked to comply with a range of regulations on school policies on exclusions, behaviour, outdoor trips and combating bullying. It was asked to update procedures for child protection and the appointment of staff and to improve facilities for toilets and washrooms as well as for sick children. In addition, it was asked to give details to parents about academic performance, the complaints procedures and the information about staff qualifications.

Evaluation of the school

Maple House independent school, although satisfactory at the time of the last inspection, offers an inadequate level of education. The aim of the school to provide a safe and appealing environment is largely met through its attractive building which is maintained to a high standard. However, the quality of the teaching and assessment, as well as the missed opportunities for learning within the curriculum, means that many of the pupils are not making the progress of which they are capable. Consequently, the school's aim to develop children's social, practical and intellectual skills according to Montessori ideals is not fully realised. The provision for the Early Years Foundation Stage is inadequate overall because it does not meet aspects of that provision well enough. A number of regulations in the quality of education, the curriculum, teaching and assessment are not met. The school does not fulfil its duties under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995.

¹ www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2002/ukpga_20020032_en_14#pt10-ch1-pb4-l1g162

The school has rightly addressed some of the issues raised at the last inspection and has improved its toilet and washroom facilities, and has provided a place for sick children as well as some facilities for disabled people. The care and welfare of pupils is good and spiritual moral, social and cultural education is satisfactory. All the regulations are met with regard to safeguarding, information for parents and the procedures for handling complaints about the school.

Quality of education

The curriculum is inadequate, even though the school judged it to be good, and it does not follow the main aims of the school. This is because the curriculum lacks intellectually challenging activities and too much of what is offered in the class is narrowly constrained by the overuse of commercial worksheets and text books. There is a lack of technological and practically based science investigations; the outdoor space is not used well enough as a learning environment for the Early Years Foundation Stage and there is a lack of appropriate activities and displays set up around the classes to stimulate and motivate pupils. The opportunities for pupils to follow their own lines of enquiry through investigation and research techniques are limited in science, history and geography as pupils read from texts and copy set pieces from the board or books. Pupils are not aware of different faiths from around the world because these are not studied in sufficient depth. Some pupils took part in a project to present a case for the use of some wasteland that is adjacent to the school, which linked mapping, measuring, writing and creative work well. They designed plans as to how they would like to use the space and petitioned the local Member of Parliament to see whether they could lease the land for recreational activities. Many pupils take opportunities to study ballet and music tuition while at the school and this, together with the teaching of French, widens the curriculum throughout the school.

While the school has suitable policies and plans which follow National Curriculum subject guidance, there is no teaching of information and communication technology (ICT) through the use of computer or electronic equipment. Science is rarely taught through experimentation and investigation, and problem-solving activities are only infrequently used in mathematics. Pupils do not experience any acts of collective worship as a whole school or in age-related groups. Access to ICT, raised as a concern at the last inspection, has still not been addressed. Learning about computer skills is set as a homework activity, which means that there is an unequal access to this part of the curriculum, particularly in how well pupils are taught and learn these essential skills for the future.

Teaching and assessment is inadequate because teachers do not display sufficient subject knowledge and expertise, so that subjects are appropriately taught to different age groups. This lack of subject knowledge is especially apparent in the upper junior classes where lessons are more formal, and in the Early Years Foundation Stage where important parts of the curriculum such as outdoor learning

and ICT are missing. Throughout the infants and junior parts of the school, pupils are organised to work individually and experience new skills and concepts from commercial textbook exercises rather than from first-hand evidence, exploration or experimentation based on what pupils know, understand and can do. Teachers monitor pupils' progress, mark their work individually and give explanations about the text on the page being worked on, so that each pupil can work at their own pace. However, all too frequently pupils are waiting for the teacher to see their work or to help them with a difficulty before they can move on to the next stage of learning. Teachers do not routinely record assessments of how well pupils are doing, so the tracking of progress over time is not an integral part of the school's work.

Pupils do not make enough progress in their learning as they move through the school from Year 1 to Year 6. Standards of attainment are no better than broadly average and are not as high as the school believes them to be. The lack of sufficient assessment data in the school means teachers are not able to use this information to accurately plan the next stage of the pupils' learning or to know how well pupils are achieving. Teachers test pupils regularly for spelling and at the end of a unit of work. However, there is little evidence that indicates this information is used to plan the next stages in learning. Tests taken at the end of Year 6 in 2009 indicate that while pupils achieve broadly average levels in English, achievement is below the national average in mathematics and science. Although it is still early in the new term, there was very little work in the pupils' books and on display around the school.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

While the school judged spiritual, moral, social and cultural education as good, it is adequate overall. Pupils' attendance is good. They say they enjoy school and are keen learners, although they did comment that some lessons are repeating work they have learnt previously. There are no formal whole-school or class assemblies or other planned opportunities for reflection on the teaching of different religions, although the school promotes tolerance well and pupils learn to appreciate different cultures. Opportunities for developing spiritual awareness are missed in the classrooms without practical science lessons or the experience of wonder which may arise in studying modern technology. Pupils' behaviour at most times is good, particularly in lessons. There is an ethos of care and respect which permeates all that the school does. Pupils say they feel safe and that adults are easily approachable if they have concerns. Pupils relate very well to each other and the adults in the school.

Pupils are not developing well enough as independent thinkers because of the narrowness of the curriculum throughout the school. They do not possess strong social skills such as how to behave when confronted with the unusual or something different. Pupils' behaviour at times, when approached by a visitor, is to ask immature questions and to be distracted from their work and behave in a silly fashion. Pupils have not been taught how to play appropriately or how to respond well in a different environment. This was apparent when outside at break and lunch

times when they often run around the small area shouting and letting off much 'pent-up steam'. Pupils contribute well to the school and wider community through their participation in school productions involving music and drama and they help to raise funds for charities, including Children in Need.

Welfare, health and safety of the pupils

Provision is good. Pupils are well cared for and the school provides a secure and safe environment for them. Healthy, freshly cooked food is prepared daily and pupils are encouraged to take physical exercise through regular swimming and physical education lessons. The school does not routinely elicit the views of pupils through a pupil council for example, and pupils expressed the wish to see the menus beforehand so they could know what they are going to be eating for lunch.

Activities are planned at break times, although, because the playground is small, time for outdoor exercise is usually restricted to one or two 30-minute sessions daily. Some of the pupils said they would like more physical activity during the day.

All safeguarding and welfare requirements are robust. Risk assessments and fire safety regulations are carried out regularly, although the school has not conducted a fire practice this term despite the fact that there are new children in the school. Medical provision is now good in the school with a number of first-aiders, trained staff and a medical room where pupils can rest if unwell. The school has not planned how it will meet the needs of a disabled child or member of staff at the school, although there is a toilet for the disabled. Therefore, it does not fulfil its duties under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

The school has established suitable procedures for ensuring that, prior to taking up their responsibilities, all teaching and non-teaching staff, volunteers, and the proprietorial body are checked for their suitability to work with children and young people. The school had not until this inspection kept its records in electronic format, but now recognises the need to maintain electronic records regularly and was able to demonstrate that it had done this by the end of the inspection.

School's premises and accommodation

The accommodation is maintained to a high standard and meets the needs of the pupils and staff. Most classrooms are of a suitable size for the number of pupils but are not always organised to facilitate the child-initiated activities and independent learning opportunities as set out in the Montessori philosophy. The outside playground, while small, has been recently resurfaced in 'astro-turf' so that it provides a safer and more inviting area in which children and pupils can play and run around. There is no gymnasium, large hall or playing fields, so the school transports pupils off-site for physical education and swimming lessons. The small hall is used for

dining, ballet and music tuition. There is no space to separate older and younger children during break times, so the school has to timetable the use of the area carefully, ensuring all get equal access. However, this timetabling restricts the development and use of an outside learning environment for the children in the Early Years Foundation Stage and this limits the curriculum provision for the youngest children. Disability access is limited to the ground floor.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

Information for parents is available through a website and prospectus as well as regular newsletters. Parents are made aware of the complaints procedures and can access information about staff and policies on request to the school. Parents are provided with an annual report of their child's progress and meet staff twice a year to discuss their children's standards and progress. Parents of the oldest pupils are supplied individually with results from recent national tests and given information about how each pupil has performed against national standards.

Procedures for handling complaints

The school has full procedures in place for dealing with complaints. These are available on request. A few parents said they did not know about the procedures, but these are referred to on the website and in the prospectus.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

The Early Years Foundation Stage is inadequate overall because it is often too formal in its delivery and is not based on nationally or Montessori-recommended child-initiated activities. Almost half the pupils at the school are between three and five years old and therefore in the Early Years Foundation Stage of learning. They are divided by age into two Nursery classes, one Reception class and one Year 1 class where the oldest of the Early Years Foundation group of children work alongside Year 1 children. Although the classes have a range of suitable desk accommodation, one Nursery class is small for the number of children in it and is on the second floor, as is the Reception class. This restricts free access to the outside for learning for these age groups. The children upstairs also have no access to toilets and washrooms, thus limiting their opportunity to learn how to use these facilities independently. Classrooms are arranged for group work but resources are limited in areas such as role play, sand and water, wheeled vehicles and computers. Children do not have enough opportunity to make choices about what they want to learn. Too few resources are set out for them so that they can initiate their own activity or investigation and tasks are often mundane, such as colouring worksheets. At times children gaze out the window rather than play with the construction equipment set out for them.

While the learning areas for this age group are secure and supervised, there is no free access to the outside curriculum for two thirds of the children in this stage of

learning. In the class which can access the outside through a door, there is no free-flow learning made available for children who may want to choose to go outside. The school does not have large wheeled vehicles or play equipment for the sole use of the Early Years Foundation Stage children and does not plan enough time outside to meet the requirements for this. Along with the rest of the school they have two short periods of play outside.

The school lacks a clear understanding of what the provision should be because it has not evaluated its provision against other settings in the area. It has not provided staff development for teachers to learn about the curriculum, although three staff are at present in Year 2 of a Foundation Degree in Early Childhood Studies. There is no clear leadership which is ensuring that the appropriate provision is provided. Members of staff are qualified as Montessori level 4 teachers and one teacher is a qualified teacher. However they do not have any full-time helper so that they can manage and supervise the curriculum effectively, particularly access to the outside. At the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage while children reach good levels in speaking, listening and reading, their social, creative, physical, technological and scientific skills are poorly developed.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school meets all of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as amended ('the Regulations'), with the exception of those listed below.²

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of the curriculum (standard 1) and must:

- provide teaching in scientific, mathematical and technological problem-solving so that pupils can reach the levels of attainment expected of them in these subjects (paragraph 1(2)(a)(ii))
- develop a curriculum which ensures all subject matter is appropriate for the ages and aptitudes of the pupils (paragraph 1(2)(b))
- establish a curriculum which provides opportunities for all pupils to learn and make progress (paragraph 1(2)(i))
- improve teaching so that it enables pupils to acquire new knowledge, and make progress according to their ability so that they increase their understanding and develop their skills in the subjects taught (paragraph 1(3)(a))
- improve teaching so that it encourages pupils to apply intellectual efforts and learn to think for themselves (paragraph 1(3)(b))

² www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si2003/20031910.htm

- establish systems whereby lessons are consistently better planned and more effective teaching methods are used to manage class time more wisely (paragraph 1(3)(c))
- ensure teachers have a clearer understanding of:
 - the age group for which they are responsible
 - how to set up challenging teaching and learning activities for that group
 - how to assess the progress pupils make in class
 - how to record this information and plan lessons to meet the needs of each pupil (paragraph 1(3)(d))
- use the information from assessments and marking to plan teaching that ensures all pupils make progress (paragraph 1(3)(g)).

In order to comply with the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 as amended, the school should devise a three-year accessibility plan.³

In order to comply with the learning and development requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage, the school must:

- secure appropriate training for staff delivering the Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum
- provide open access to an outside curriculum area at more frequent times of the day so children are free to make choices about where they want to learn
- provide a wider range of equipment so that pupils can access scientific, technological, physical and creative learning more fully
- reorganise the Early Years Foundation Stage classes so that teachers can work more closely together and children can access toilets and the outside learning environment more independently.

³ www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts1995/ukpga_19950050_en_1

Inspection judgement recording form

outstanding	good	satisfactory	inadequate
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The quality of education

Overall quality of education				√
How well the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of pupils				√
How effective teaching and assessment are in meeting the full range of pupils' needs				√
How well pupils make progress in their learning				√

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

Quality of provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development			√	
The behaviour of pupils		√		

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

The overall welfare, health and safety of pupils		√		
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The quality and effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

What are the outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage like?				√
What is the quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage like?				√
How effective is the leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage?				√
How good is the overall effectiveness: How well does the school meet the needs of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage?				√

School details

Name of school	Maple House School		
DCSF number	306/6090		
Unique reference number	131770		
Type of school	Montessori		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	January 1999		
Age range of pupils	3–11		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 49	Girls: 55	104
Annual fees (day pupils)	£ 4,510		
Address of school	Maple House School 23–27 Parchmore Road Thornton Heath Surrey CR7 8LY		
Telephone number	0208 6531827		
Fax number	0208 7718595		
Email address	maplehouseschool@yahoo.co.uk		
Headteacher	Mrs Pauline Khoo		
Proprietor	Mrs Pauline Khoo		
Reporting inspector	Linda Kelsey HMI		
Dates of inspection	24–25 September 2009		