

Walthamstow Montessori School

Independent school inspection report

DCSF registration number	320/6064
Unique Reference Number (URN)	134579
URN for registered childcare and social care	EY405124
Inspection number	345368
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Reporting inspector	Michèle Messaoudi

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Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester
M2 7LA

T: 08456 404040
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

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Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out by Ofsted under section 162A of the Education Act 2002¹, as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005², 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.

The inspection of registered provision³ was conducted under Section 49(2) of the Childcare Act 2006.⁴

This was a light touch inspection which focused principally on the quality of education provided by the school, its provision for the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, the arrangements for safeguarding pupils and the improvements the school has made since its last inspection.

Information about the school

Walthamstow Montessori School is an independent, non-selective nursery and preparatory school for boys and girls aged between two and eleven years. It opened in April 2001. Currently there are 87 pupils on roll, 54 of whom attend part-time. Of the 61 children in the Early Years Foundation Stage, 14 are under three and 41 receive public funding under the government's nursery education scheme. There is one pupil with a statement of special educational needs. Many pupils are bilingual or have English as an additional language. Pupils and staff come from diverse cultural backgrounds. Most classes are housed in one building which has an outdoor area with an all-weather surface. The elementary and upper preparatory classes are accommodated in another property nearby. A local park is used frequently and two tennis courts are rented weekly in the summer and autumn terms. The school provides a daily breakfast club for pupils of all ages for one and a half hours. It is registered on the Early Years Register and both the compulsory and voluntary part of the Childcare Register.

The school aims 'to create a stimulating, caring, happy and safe environment for ALL the children in our care; to create a developmentally appropriate curriculum to meet the needs of each child in line with the Montessori philosophy of education.' It was last inspected in June 2007.

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

² www.opsi.gov.uk/ACTS/acts2005/ukpga_20050018_en_15#sch8

³ Schools which provide childcare for children from birth until the term in which they reach their third birthday must register this provision separately with Ofsted.

⁴ www.opsi.gov.uk/ACTS/acts2006/ukpga_20060021_en_4#pt3-ch2-pb4-l1g49

Evaluation of the school

Walthamstow Montessori School continues to provide a good quality of education and to meet its aims fully. Parents are highly satisfied with the school's work and typically say: 'We can't praise the school highly enough.' While expanding to the full primary age range, the school has maintained the good quality of its curriculum and teaching, ensuring that pupils make good progress throughout the school. The overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage is outstanding and children in this age group make outstanding progress in relation to their varying starting points. Pupils of all ages develop high levels of self-confidence and independence, reflected in their outstanding behaviour and attitudes to learning, because provision for their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding.

Safeguarding arrangements are robust and contribute to maintaining the outstanding provision for pupils' welfare, health and safety. The school has improved its provision since the last inspection and now meets all of the regulations for independent schools.

Quality of education

The quality of education is good. The curriculum is good with some outstanding features. In the Early Years Foundation Stage, it is carefully balanced between adult-led activities and opportunities for children to develop their creativity and independence by initiating their play. Throughout the school, there is a strong emphasis on developing pupils' basic skills in literacy and numeracy, which gives them a solid foundation to access the rest of the curriculum. Pupils who have a statement of special educational needs are supported effectively by individual education plans that meet their needs closely. Pupils' speaking and communication skills are enhanced effectively by regular drama activities, including participation in role play, two annual plays, verse speaking and poetry writing and recitals. Reading skills are taught very well from the Early Years Foundation Stage and pupils throughout the school have a wealth of opportunities to write creatively and independently in several subject areas. Termly projects based on a geography or history theme enable pupils from Years 1 to 6 to develop independent research skills and to make cross-curricular links that make their learning more coherent. The use of specialist teaching on a weekly basis has widened since the last inspection and now includes information and communication technology (ICT), design and technology, and guitar, in addition to science, physical education (PE), art, French, music, recorder, violin and clarinet. Provision for music is a strength and annual musical 'showcases' give pupils the chance to compose their own music, perform individually or in small groups and to sing with their class. Provision for ICT has greatly improved since the last inspection and is now strong. Pupils of all ages have weekly ICT lessons and the range of ICT resources has expanded to include additional computers, programmable floor robots and digital cameras. Religious education (RE) has been given more prominence and is now taught as a discrete

subject to all primary year groups. The programme of personal, social and health education contributes effectively to developing pupils' commitment to healthy lifestyles. The curriculum is enriched by a much broader range of educational visits than in the last inspection. Whilst the curriculum for Years 2 to 6 has been planned carefully for literacy and numeracy, the schemes of work for science, history and geography are only just satisfactory as they do not consistently include the skills to be taught throughout this age range.

The quality of teaching and assessment is good. Staff have good knowledge of the subject areas they teach and of pupils' aptitudes, prior attainment and needs. They establish extremely good relationships in their groups, based on mutual respect. Small classes enable staff to give individual pupils a considerable amount of attention and to respond to their needs promptly, which is much appreciated by parents. The best teaching is underpinned by very high expectations of what pupils can achieve. It is characterised by very effective questioning that checks pupils' learning and deepens their understanding; a dynamic style that stimulates pupils and helps them work at a fast pace so that they produce a good amount of work; and suitable tasks that provide a high level of challenge to all pupils throughout the lesson. In such lessons, pupils are fully absorbed in their learning because they enjoy the challenge and so they make outstanding progress. On occasion, the teaching is satisfactory rather than good because pupils are not challenged consistently and so cannot progress at the rate of which they are capable. This happens in particular when the planning does not detail the key skills which pupils will learn and so does not support the teaching sufficiently. Most staff are Montessori-trained and use Montessori sensorial resources very effectively to support pupils' learning.

There is a good assessment framework in place, some aspects of which have improved since the last inspection. For example, learning targets are given to pupils in English, mathematics and science and discussed with parents during formal consultation meetings. Progress against the targets is reported termly. Reports also give a clearer indication of pupils' attainment and progress in every subject area. In the Early Years Foundation Stage, staff note their observations of children's learning, carefully combining the Montessori system and the assessment requirements of this stage. Staff use praise and verbal feedback effectively to encourage pupils of all ages and show them how to improve. However, in the primary classes, the quality of marking is inconsistent so that pupils do not always receive the most effective guidance on how to improve. The school is in the early stages of using an electronic system to track pupils' progress throughout the school.

As a result of the good curriculum and teaching, most pupils make good progress in their academic learning, and outstanding progress in their personal development, as noted by parents. In the Early Years Foundation Stage, children make outstanding progress because teaching and assessment are sharply focused on the best possible outcomes for them.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

Provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding, as it was in the last inspection. Many parents support this view. Pupils thoroughly enjoy their learning and greatly appreciate the school's caring and supportive family environment, which is reflected in their high levels of attendance and outstanding behaviour and attitudes to learning. They feel safe from bullying and racial prejudice. They take responsibility for their own learning and express their views with confidence. They form extremely positive relationships and play and work harmoniously with each other. They show respect for others and for the school environment. The personal qualities and good basic skills which they develop prepare them extremely well for their future.

Pupils contribute to the school community by participating enthusiastically in lessons and in presentations to parents and peers. They can aspire to roles of responsibility such as being a member of the school council or an accident prevention officer. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage plant vegetables and flowers in the garden. Pupils contribute to the local community by singing at a local care home, collecting food parcels for the homeless and supporting a local blind resident. They participate in the borough 'Walk on Wednesday' scheme. They contribute to the global community by raising funds; for example they made and sold cakes to help the victims of the Haiti earthquake. A wealth of activities and educational visits enhance pupils' cultural development and familiarise them with British institutions. Pupils are well prepared for life in a multicultural society by the programme of RE and through activities in other curriculum areas, as well as by regular events such as Black History month and participation in local music festivals that celebrate cultural diversity. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage have recently experienced Hungarian music and dance.

Safeguarding pupils' welfare, health and safety

The school has maintained the outstanding quality of its provision for pupils' welfare, health and safety, and its safeguarding procedures are robust. Rigorous recruitment procedures ensure that all the required checks are carried out on staff to determine their suitability to work with children. These are recorded centrally. All the essential policies aiming at minimising risks in all circumstances are in place and implemented consistently. A broad range of training supports the staff in fulfilling their responsibilities. Several members of staff have first aid training and two have paediatric qualifications. Children settle in quickly in the Early Years Foundation Stage and feel very safe because of the outstanding care they receive, which is noted by parents. Pupils are exceptionally well aware of health and safety issues from an early age because they are involved in practical activities that mimic real-life situations, such as a fire or road safety challenges. The school has introduced cycling proficiency training for Years 5 and 6. Pupils develop a good understanding of how to eat healthily because the school encourages them to try new and unfamiliar fruit and

vegetables. The breakfast club provision makes a good contribution to pupils' emotional well-being and social skills, and encourages healthy eating habits. Pupils enjoy the wide range of physical activities on offer in and out of PE lessons. The school compensates for the lack of a suitable outdoor play area for primary pupils in the new premises by using the local park. Pupils are encouraged to walk or cycle to school and the school was given a travel plan award in 2008.

The school fulfils its obligations under the Disability Discrimination Act 2002.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

The overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage is outstanding. The quality of the provision is outstanding as children make outstanding progress in all the areas of learning in relation to their varying starting points. Consequently, by the age of five years, they achieve the expected goals and most exceed them. Staff are suitably qualified and know the children extremely well because they teach small groups. Teaching is vibrant and staff plan learning activities which challenge and actively engage the children. There are excellent systems to assess individual children's learning and monitor their progress, and assessment records are shared with parents. Staff use this information to match activities to the needs of individual children very closely. Teachers make effective use of questioning to establish understanding. In lessons, there is strong focus on developing speaking and listening skills and children make an excellent start in learning to read and write. Provision for children under the age of three is excellent and meets the requirements of the Early Years and Childcare Registers. The breakfast club provision is good and meets all the childcare requirements. Adults go to great lengths to develop the children's independence and social skills. The school makes good use of adults' specialist knowledge and educational visits to enhance learning. The leaders have rightly identified that the outdoor area is not used consistently to promote children's development in the six areas of learning and have improvement plans already in place.

Because children are so engrossed in their learning, their behaviour is outstanding and teachers have very high expectations of their social development. Children cooperate exceptionally well with each other and this makes for a very pleasant and enjoyable learning environment. Children make great strides in understanding how to stay healthy and safe. Very effective procedures ensure that children are able to learn in safe and caring surroundings. The leadership and the management of this stage are outstanding because they are sharply focused on promoting the best possible outcomes for all children, as a result of being extremely well informed by very close partnerships with parents, regular consultation with children, thorough self-review and relevant training.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school meets all of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as amended January 2005.

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:

- ensure that the skills which pupils will learn are made clear in all schemes of work and all lesson planning
- further improve the quality of feedback given to pupils, particularly through marking, to ensure that they always have a clear understanding of how to improve their work
- implement the school's plan to consolidate the use of tracking systems to monitor pupils' progress throughout the school and inform the strengths and weaknesses of the provision
- in the Early Years Foundation Stage, as planned, make more consistent use of the outdoor area to support children's learning in the six areas of learning.

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 of the Early Years Foundation Stage provision

How good are the outcomes for children in the EYFS?	✓			
What is the quality of provision in the EYFS?	✓			
How effectively is the EYFS led and managed?	✓			
Overall effectiveness: how well does the school meet the needs of children in the EYFS?	✓			

School details

Name of school	Walthamstow Montessori School		
DCSF number	320/6064		
Unique Reference Number (URN)	134579		
EY URN (for registered childcare only)	EY405124		
Type of school	Nursery and preparatory		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	2001		
Age range of pupils	2-11 years		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 17	Girls: 16	Total: 33
Number on roll (part-time pupils)	Boys: 32	Girls: 22	Total: 54
Number of pupils aged 0-3 in registered childcare provision	Boys: 10	Girls: 4	Total: 14
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need	Boys: 0	Girls: 1	Total: 1
Annual fees (day pupils)	£1,425 to £4,860		
Annual fees (childcare)	£1,425 for two morning sessions per week		
Address of school	Penryhn Hall Penryhn Avenue Walthamstow London E17 5DA		
Telephone number	0208 523 2968		
Fax number	0208 523 2968		
Email address	e17montessori@aol.com		
Headteacher	Ms Janet Arnold		
Proprietor	Ms Lorna Mahoney		
Reporting inspector	Mrs Michèle Messaoudi		
Date of inspection	23 March 2010		