

Montessori House

Independent School

Inspection report

DCSF Registration Number	309 6068
Unique Reference Number	102170
Inspection number	320367
Inspection dates	17-18 January 2008
Reporting inspector	Cecile Corfield

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).

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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

The school first opened at the proprietor's home in Muswell Hill, London, in 1984 and moved to its current premises in 1990. The school is registered to educate children to the age of six years, although there are no six year olds on roll at present. The curriculum is firmly based on Montessori principles and practice with due regard to the Foundation Stage framework. In the Montessori environment, children are encouraged to develop a caring attitude to themselves, those around them and their surroundings. There are 100 children on roll with 49 children aged 3 and over of whom 17 are full-time and 32 are part-time. No child has a statement of special educational need. The provision for the youngest children aged 6 months to 2+ years was inspected by Ofsted's Children's Directorate in January 2006. This inspection focussed on the educational provision for the children aged 3 years and over. It is the school's first published report for this age group.

Evaluation of the school

Montessori House provides an outstanding quality of education. Curricular provision is outstanding and is well-matched to the needs of each child. Teaching is outstanding and enables the children to make excellent progress. The children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding as is their behaviour. The quality of care is outstanding with excellent procedures for the children's welfare, health and safety. The school meets all the regulatory requirements.

Quality of education

The school's curricular provision is outstanding. It is firmly based on Montessori principles and practice and integrated very well with the six areas of learning in the Foundation Stage framework for this age group. Planning is excellent and clearly identifies what each child is expected to learn. Long-, medium- and short-term planning documents provide a wealth of detail of programmes designed for each child. The curriculum is carefully adapted to meet the needs of all children, including those with special educational needs. Children who need extra support have regularly monitored individual education plans, and after consultation with parents, are provided with appropriate resources and educational opportunities. Personal, social and emotional development is a real strength of the provision. This is a core part of Montessori education. The school fully supports the principle that young children learn through play and by engaging in well-planned activities. In practice,

the school is successful in meeting its aim to enable all children to learn and develop skills to the best of their ability. Grace and courtesy exercises help children to deal with everyday situations and life by showing them what to do and what to say in an appropriate way. The curriculum is extended further by weekly French lessons, swimming at a local pool, drama and ballet lessons after school and educational visits to areas of interest such as the library and Highgate Woods. Educational resources are high quality and in sufficient quantity. There is a good range of Montessori materials for sensorial experiences, for example, to promote mathematical development, including logical thinking, sorting and classification and education of the senses.

The quality of teaching and assessment is outstanding. Continuous and thorough assessment of each child's learning and personal development informs the choice of learning opportunities presented to him or her. Children's achievement is measured against their proficiency in using the practical materials that support their learning and are designed to ensure its progression. In addition, staff record detailed observations that identify individual children's next learning step in each area of the curriculum, following both the Foundation Stage and the Montessori guidelines. Owing to exemplary planning and rigorous monitoring of each child's progress, they make at least good progress in all areas of the curriculum and outstanding progress in most. Children are very well prepared for the next stage of their education and most are successful in moving on to a school of their parents' choice.

The staff work as a cohesive team and teachers ensure that the curriculum is implemented skilfully to develop independent learning in children. Staff prepare the classrooms with well-chosen resources to provide a balance of adult-led and child-initiated learning experiences. They establish excellent working relationships in their classes based on a sensitive appreciation of individual children's emotional state, social development, learning style and interests. Consequently, children work very well independently, in pairs or in groups and develop a high level of autonomy. Staff respond to children's changing moods very rapidly and are quick to suggest a new activity, so that time is always used wisely. Good listening skills are fostered throughout the daily activities, which helps children learn from each other as well as from the adults, and gives them space for personal reflection to express a view, solve a problem or make a decision. Children's thinking is promoted very effectively by teachers asking probing questions and giving children time to work out an answer.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

The provision for the children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding, as reflected in their excellent personal development. Parents report that their children enjoy school very much. The staff are warm and caring and provide ideal models of courtesy and mutual respect. Consequently, children are happy, calm, considerate and friendly.

The school's ethos is highly successful in promoting self-motivation, self-discipline and strong social skills. Children develop positive attitudes to learning based on very high levels of self confidence and keen desire to learn and achieve well. Their behaviour is outstanding. They are able to sustain their attention for longer spans of time than expected. They manage their own learning competently. For example, four-year olds working in a group had mature discussions to decide how to use musical instruments to produce the most pleasing sounds and which songs to sing. They demonstrated a good sense of equal opportunities as they ensured that each one of them would experience using each instrument. All these qualities, coupled with the very good standards of literacy and numeracy they achieve, prepare them well for their future economic well-being.

Children contribute positively to their environment by cleaning, washing and tidying after practical activities, as well as preparing the tables for lunch. They have regular opportunities to support their peers during activities, which helps them acquire leadership skills and a strong sense of responsibility. They gain a good understanding of what it means to be a pro-active citizen beyond their classroom experience by learning about 'people who help us', recycling materials and caring for the environment. They develop an appreciation of diversity by learning about world religions and various cultural practices, as well as by interacting with their peers and the staff who come from diverse heritages. Their cultural development is supported well by a fairly good range of multicultural resources and educational visits.

Welfare, health and safety of the pupils

Provision to ensure the children's welfare, health and safety is outstanding. All regulations are met and staff understand fully procedures for emergencies. Each member of staff is trained in child protection matters and has first aid qualifications. Fire drills are undertaken each half-term and details are logged appropriately. Appropriate risk assessments are undertaken before children have out-of-school visits. Thorough risk assessments are carried out on the building and grounds to ensure the safety of children and staff at all times. The school places great emphasis on promoting healthy eating. The menus have been revised and the nutritional value of meals has been improved in line with national interest in school meals. During the inspection, as part of a project on food, the children had tasting sessions to encourage them to try fruits they may not be used to. Apples and vegetable sticks are provided each day for the morning snack. Drinking water is freely available. The school has a clear policy and a three-year statement on how it intends to improve its facilities and curriculum for adults and children with disabilities.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

The school has carried out thoroughly all required checks on staff before appointment. Details are kept, as required, on a single central register.

School's premises and accommodation

The school is situated on the first and top floors of an attractive Victorian detached house. The accommodation provides a safe and effective learning environment. All stairways are securely gated. Rooms are bright and airy with sufficient space for the numbers of children on roll. At the rear of the premises there is an interesting garden that is soft-surfaced and has trees and shrubs which provide shade. There is sufficient space for the children to use mobile wheeled toys, apparatus for balancing and an activity tower. The garden is used by the children during the day, weather permitting.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

The quality of information for parents is good and fully meets requirements. Parents and prospective parents receive a detailed prospectus and handbook, which clearly detail all aspects of school life. In the pre-inspection questionnaire, a small number of parents stated that they were not kept fully informed about their child's progress. However, inspectors did not agree with this as each Thursday afternoon after school, parents have the opportunity for their child to show them their work and teachers are available to talk to. The headteacher will always make time to talk with parents on the telephone if that is easier for them. Twice a year, parents can have a more formal twenty minute consultation with staff. Parents are informed that the school's policies and other documents may be seen upon request.

Procedures for handling complaints

The policy and procedures for complaints meets requirements and parents are informed in the handbook that they may request a copy.

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:

- continue to develop information for parents on their child's progress, especially for those who cannot visit on a Thursday afternoon
- further develop resources to promote the children's multi-cultural awareness.

School details

Name of school	Montessori House		
DCSF number	309 6068		
Unique reference number	102170		
Type of school	Montessori day school		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	1984		
Age range of pupils	0-5		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils) 3-4 years	Boys: 5	Girls: 12	Total: 17
Number on roll (part-time pupils) 3-4 yrs	Boys:14	Girls: 18	Total: 32
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational needs	Boys: 0	Girls: 0	Total: 0
Number of children receiving funded nursery education	Boys: 19	Girls: 30	Total: 49
Annual fees (day pupils)	£ 8910		
Address of school	5 Princes Avenue Muswell Hill London N10 3LS		
Telephone number	02084 444399		
Fax number	02084 444399		
Email address	lisa@montessori-house.co.uk		
Headteacher	Mrs Lisa Christoforou		
Proprietor	Mrs Nichola Forsyth		
Reporting inspector	Cecile Corfield AI		
Dates of inspection	17-18 January 2008		