

Merrydays Montessori Nursery School

Inspection report for early years provision

Unique Reference Number	200679
Inspection date	04 February 2008
Inspector	Esther Gray
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Registered person	Helen Everley
Type of inspection	Integrated
Type of care	Full day care

ABOUT THIS INSPECTION

The purpose of this inspection is to assure government, parents and the public of the quality of childcare and, if applicable, of nursery education. The inspection was carried out under Part XA Children Act 1989 as introduced by the Care Standards Act 2000 and, where nursery education is provided, under Schedule 26 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998.

This report details the main strengths and any areas for improvement identified during the inspection. The judgements included in the report are made in relation to the outcomes for children set out in the Children Act 2004; the National Standards for under 8s day care and childminding; and, where nursery education is provided, the *Curriculum guidance for the foundation stage*.

The report includes information on any complaints about the childcare provision which Ofsted has received since the last inspection or registration or 1 April 2004 whichever is the later.

The key inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding: this aspect of the provision is of exceptionally high quality

Good: this aspect of the provision is strong

Satisfactory: this aspect of the provision is sound

Inadequate: this aspect of the provision is not good enough

For more information about early years inspections, please see the booklet *Are you ready for your inspection?* which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

THE QUALITY AND STANDARDS OF THE CARE AND NURSERY EDUCATION

On the basis of the evidence collected on this inspection:

The quality and standards of the care are good. The registered person meets the National Standards for under 8s day care and childminding.

The quality and standards of the nursery education are outstanding.

WHAT SORT OF SETTING IS IT?

Merrydays Montessori Nursery School opened in 1958 and has been under the current management since September 2000. It operates from The Memorial Hall in the centre of Henley in Arden in Warwickshire. The nursery has sole use of the building when operational. There is a fully enclosed outdoor play area.

There are currently 59 children aged from two to eight years on roll. This includes 32 funded three- and four-year-olds. Children attend for a variety of sessions. The nursery currently supports a number of children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The nursery opens five days a week during school term times. Sessions are from 09.15 until 12.15 and 13.15 to 14.45. Children can stay for a packed lunch.

10 staff work with the children. Over half the staff have early years qualifications to National Vocational Qualification Level 2 or 3. Three staff have a Montessori qualification and two a State Registered Teacher qualification. The provider has also completed studies for the Early Years Professional Status qualification. Four staff are currently working towards a recognised early years qualification. The nursery achieved accreditation by Montessori Education United

Kingdom. This body subsequently inspected the setting who also receive support from a mentor teacher from the Early Years and Childcare Partnership.

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PROVISION

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

Although children are suitably protected from infection staff do not ensure that children always use liquid soap or individual towels or paper towels to dry their hands. As a result, there is a potential risk of cross-infection when children are attending to their own personal hygiene. Children are, however, learning to manage these tasks independently and are encouraged to take care of their own environment. They learn important lessons about the need for personal hygiene and cleanliness. This includes the importance of cleaning their teeth regularly. Parents are well informed about recommended exclusion times for communicable diseases. Children who become ill or injured are tended to appropriately by staff trained in paediatric first aid. Consequently, children are taken well care of if they have an accident or become ill.

Children enjoy many opportunities to experience physical activity and develop their skills. They are appropriately nourished and learn about the importance of healthy eating. Children independently decide when they are in need of refreshment and go to a café area to take up a plate on which to make their choice from a variety of fruit already prepared for them. Although there are some opportunities missed by staff to encourage further independence skills such as in a regular task in supervising the use of tools to cut up fruit, there are many other opportunities for children to develop these skills in other areas of the learning environment. For example, children learn to use cookery utensils and share resources in creating freshly baked items on a daily basis. Consequently, children learn about making healthy choices and the benefits of fresh air, exercise to enable them to lead a healthy lifestyle.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is outstanding.

Children are well protected from harm because staff have a very good understanding of their role in child protection. They are able to put appropriate procedures into practice, are well trained and keep up-to-date with any changes to the procedure outlined by the Local Safeguarding Children Board. Staff are confident in their knowledge and how to apply this when following the procedures. Their role and responsibility are shared successfully with parents. Children are secure and well supervised in premises, which are suitable for the purpose because the provider and staff ensure that the environment gives children very good access to a comprehensive range of facilities that successfully promote children's development. Children use safe and suitable resources, toys and equipment that stimulate and challenge them.

Children's safety is excellently promoted because the registered person takes positive steps to promote safety. Photographic reminders are kept of all areas where risks have been identified and require both staff and children to take action to safeguard them. For example, hazards associated with adjoining doors are identified as a possible hazard and these doors are kept shut to protect children from harm. All exits are free from clutter and hazard to ensure they can exit the building safely. Children are learning to keep themselves safe. They always clear up after themselves as part of the routine of the setting. They are taught to use tools safely as a regular daily routine in the cookery activities or, for example, in the use of art and craft materials. Children and staff are clear about the emergency evacuation process and they rehearse

this regularly together. They learn about danger in the local environment. For instance, children learn about danger when walking near traffic or when encountering trains and train lines, as they walk up to the local station and see the trains arrive and depart. Consequently, children are safeguarded from harm and taught how to keep themselves safe.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

Children are confident, independent and are developing very good self-esteem. They separate from the parents confidently, with no signs of worry. Those that have only recently joined the nursery are engaged in play successfully by staff and they become engrossed in an activity of interest quite quickly. Because the sessions are not broken up, or play interrupted, they do not become distressed as play activities change. There are no rigid routines because children lead the programme, for example, they engage in outdoor play at a convenient time for many of the children to join in. As a result, the flash points which trigger an emotional response of being reminded that they do not have their parents and carers present does not occur. All children have their individual needs met and are developing a broad range of knowledge and skills because there are very effective plans which provide excellent activities and play opportunities that help children achieve. Children's progress is monitored effectively and this progress is shared with parents. The staff gain solid knowledge of children's starting points and children are developing a good disposition towards learning.

Nursery Education

The quality of teaching and learning is outstanding. Children benefit from very good organisation of the learning environment. This is provided by well-qualified teaching staff who attend a lot of courses to keep them not only up-to-date in Montessori methods but also educational programmes recommended by the Department of Children, Schools and Families, to ensure children benefit from programmes of learning using current best practice. All staff have very good knowledge of the learning programme and the curriculum being offered to children. Long, medium and short term plans are organised and identified in the way resources are arranged. Staff design and adapt the environment with this group of children in mind, modifying the selection of educational materials available and the physical layout to best fit the ever changing needs of children. The environment encourages children to move about freely, within reasonable limits of appropriate behaviour. Much of the time they select work that captures their interest and attention, although staff also strive to draw their attention to and capture their interest in new challenges and areas of inquiry. Within this atmosphere of spontaneous activity, children eventually have to master the basic skills identified within each activity. The areas of learning are clearly identified on charts where staff monitor children's progress in key working groups. The groups are identified to share the staff responsibility of the work in monitoring children and encouraging children. They not only select their own work most of the time, but also continue to work with tasks, returning to continue their work over many weeks or months, until finally the work is "so easy for them" that they can teach it to younger children. They are not consciously aware of belonging to any key working group and bond with the adults within the setting naturally, making close friendships across the age groups playing alongside each other. Planning, observation and assessment is used to ensure positive outcomes for children. It is clear from the charts kept by key workers that they are very clear about children's starting points and very clear about the next steps required. The Special Educational Needs Coordinator of the setting helps staff develop education and play plans from the records of observations, which note achievements attained for each child. Individual staff are very well supported in

adapting play to ensure children with learning disability and/or disability are catered for extremely well.

Children have very good opportunities to develop their attitudes and dispositions that enable them to achieve in their learning. They are motivated to learn through exciting and interesting activities. They are developing their self-confidence and self-esteem and are beginning to learn right from wrong. The process of making independent choices and exploring concepts largely on their own, means children construct their own sense of individual identity and right and wrong. This is an underpinning part of the Montessori ideology, which is proving successful for children. They are developing an awareness of their own needs and that of others and begin to understand that their actions and that of others have consequences. Children are able to become increasingly independent when dealing with their physical needs. They begin to take the initiative and to be self-sufficient within their learning by choosing activities and accessing resources for themselves. Children affirm their own presence as part of the group, for instance, as they are welcomed at registration time. Children's self-care and independence is supported very well. For example, they learn about the importance of hygiene in washing their hands and washing up a plate that they have used as they help themselves to snacks, or in obtaining resources to make and create imaginatively in the 'art bay'.

Children are challenged to develop their skills in communication language and literacy and in their mathematical knowledge. For instance, staff develop children's understanding of letter, sound recognition and in appreciating how many more buns they need in a baker's shop at circle time. Children begin to see connections and relationships in numbers, shapes and measures. They match, sort and are using mathematical language such as 'more than', 'one more', 'one less' to help them to solve problems across a wide range of practical activities such as stories, rhymes, games, puzzles and in their imaginative play. The layout of the setting ensures they develop a love of books and enjoy role play. For example they develop imaginative play as they all go on a bear hunt together, taking a familiar story to re-enact. This is well supported by staff as they develop their vocabulary and early writing skills. This is achieved using especially tailored activities and resources which develop manipulative skills. These achievements later enable them to hold a pencil and make circular movements and make marks for a purpose in free play activities across the setting. As a result, children are developing their competences well across the four aspects of communication, speaking, listening reading and writing.

Children are beginning to make sense of the world around them by investigating and exploring through first hand experiences in an interesting environment. They have opportunities to observe, explore, question and be curious in a broad range of activities that form the foundation of later learning in history, geography, science and technology. The areas of learning across the rooms that all children explore include areas of natural interest and use of the outdoor area. This is being developed by staff as a further learning environment. This area introduces further interest in music and sound with instruments outdoors and provides further sensorial areas for children to explore. As part of the long term plan to introduce the global environment to children, staff encourage children to take part in exciting activities using masks and materials as they celebrate festivals from around the world. For example, children squeal with delight as they take part in the 'dragon dance', or use the red and yellow paper ribbons as they move to the Chinese music in the hall. Children actively celebrate diversity in the wider community.

Children are very creative, expressing their own ideas and thoughts through art, music, dance, role play and imaginative play. Older children use art and craft, look at books for the research before making a replica and younger children represent their thoughts in colourful displays. For example, a string of colourful paper plates is displayed as part of the dragon which depicts

the seasonal festival in the art room. They use their senses and imaginations to create their own work and to communicate their feelings. They enjoy a wide range of physical activities that help them to develop their confidence and skills both when using large and small apparatus, tools and equipment. They are developing a positive attitude towards physical exercise and a growing awareness of how it can help them to stay healthy. Physical play is encouraged on a daily basis with as many opportunities to use the outdoor area as possible and a programme of activities in the hall indoors, as well as the musical movement and physical re-enactment of role play activities. Children are able to appreciate a wide range of music which includes familiar rhymes and songs as well as classical and multicultural music, in keeping with activities and themes they are exploring and enjoying.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

Very good arrangements are made to ensure all children are included. Cooperation and collaboration is encouraged, rather than competition and children are encouraged to treat one another with kindness and respect. There is a very well written policy which sets out 'ground rules'. This policy is shared with staff, children and parents. It begins with identifying the need to respect the feelings and opinions of all members of the group. Staff and children are encouraged to challenge views they don't agree with and be aware of transmitting negative non-verbal messages. Children's awareness of the wider multicultural environment is well supported in topics and themes covered during the year. This is achieved in using the theme to underpin many aspects of learning in art, craft, cookery, role play, music and dance. For example, during circle time, children recap what they have learned in the art room and what they have learned about the culture and stories enjoyed by the Chinese people, as they celebrate the new year of the rat. As a result, there are sufficient, suitable resources and activities to help children learn about a diverse society through their play.

Children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is fostered. The staff promote a sense of community with children learning social skills and enjoying educational experiences that cultivate children's sense of independence, self-respect and self-esteem. There are well-written supporting policies and procedures to support staff in their training and understanding of what is expected of them as role models. Staff use very softly spoken words to encourage good behaviour such as 'I couldn't hear the music then could you?' They encourage children to think about children in front of them and behind them as they take their turn in becoming the body of the dragon in musical movement. They are encouraged to take turns and share. As a result, children are able to feel a good sense of belonging, work harmoniously with others and make choices and decisions. They are developing very good self-esteem and respect for others.

Partnership with parents and carers is outstanding. Parents are keen to express their satisfaction at the level of information provided about the curriculum and opportunities given to them to join children in their learning experience from time to time. There is a folder of information, which is regularly updated, left on the counter in the foyer for parents to pick up and read. This folder includes the policies and procedures and many other significant pieces of information to include them in the life of the setting. For example, the complaints procedure is very well written, making parents aware of the staged complaints procedure and the role of the regulator at all stages. It provides parents with details of how to make contact and informs them of how the complaint will be dealt with, including the use of and access to a complaints recording process. There are parents' evenings and end of term or year reports and parents express delight at the level of information in the report. This includes examples of children's life at the setting

in photographs and examples of their work and the progress made. Consequently, staff work in harmony and cooperation with parents and carers giving consistent messages to children.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

All policies and procedures protect children well and are effectively implemented to promote good outcomes for children. Records are available and retained for inspection. They are well organised and kept confidential. Children are protected from harm as the staff are aware of the importance of ensuring that all unvetted visitors are suitable and are not left unattended with children in the setting or whilst on outings. The management and organisation of the setting is proactive in ensuring the practice of all staff contributes positively to children's good health, safety, enjoyment, achievement and ability to take an active part in the setting. Children are well cared for in a setting where the staff are committed to continue to update their skills and knowledge by attending training, having a clear sense of purpose and a commitment to continual improvement. The registered person has identified the need to further develop the systems for self-evaluation as a means to making further improvements in both care and education.

The leadership and management of the setting is outstanding. Because children learn in many different ways and at their own pace, staff here promote the Montessori approach that understands that they must "follow the child," adjusting their strategies and timetable well to fit the development of each individual child. They organise appropriate social settings and well conceived academic programs for children at their own level of development. They do this through the design of the learning environment, selection and organisation of learning activities and structure of the day. Staff create a successful learning environment for children using this approach. For example, all resources, space, toys, equipment and assistants are very well organised to ensure the provision covers all areas of learning and that all children are well supported. Overall children's needs are met.

Improvements since the last inspection

At the last inspection the provider agreed to ensure hot radiators are made safe.

Since the last inspection all radiators are out of reach of children or made safe. This ensures the safety of children within the setting.

In Nursery education, although there were no significant weaknesses identified at the last inspection, the provider was recommended to plan more opportunities for children to see written words such as signs, notices and labelling of resources and plan opportunities for children to become aware of communicating systems such as Braille and signing.

The staff have developed systems to ensure displays hold more signs and notices. Although all resources are put away each day and set out before children arrive they have been inventive in use of these resources to allow more display space and notices to develop children's awareness of written language in the environment. This includes some signs in Braille. Information about topics such as the importance of cleaning their teeth and some signs demonstrating how those with disability may also access language and literacy also promote an understanding of how words are written and used. As a result, children's appreciation of the purpose of language in its uses for communication and thinking and how to link sounds and letters is improved.

Complaints since the last inspection

The provider is required to keep a record of complaints made by parents, which they can see on request. The complaints record may contain complaints other than those made to Ofsted.

Since the last inspection there have been no complaints made to Ofsted that required the provider or Ofsted to take any action in order to meet the National Standards.

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WHAT MUST BE DONE TO SECURE FUTURE IMPROVEMENT?

The quality and standards of the care

To improve the quality and standards of care further the registered person should take account of the following recommendation(s):

- ensure positive steps to prevent the spread of infection include providing suitable hand washing and hand drying facilities; this refers to preventing cross-infection as children independently help themselves to their snack or use the toilet facilities.

The quality and standards of the nursery education

No recommendations for improvement are made because the quality and standards of nursery education are outstanding.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the leaflet *Complaints about Ofsted Early Years: concerns or complaints about Ofsted's role in regulating and inspecting childcare and early education (HMI ref no 2599)* which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk