

St Helens Montessori School

Inspection report for early years provision

Unique Reference Number	127587
Inspection date	09 October 2007
Inspector	Susan Jennifer Scott
Setting Address	St. Helens, Lower Road, East Farleigh, Maidstone, Kent, ME15 0JT
Telephone number	01622 721 731 or 01622 726 219
E-mail	jeannelleds@btconnect.com
Registered person	Marie-Elise Jeannelle Dening-Smitherman
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 good.

WHAT SORT OF SETTING IS IT?

St Helen's Montessori Nursery School opened as a nursery in 1989. It was registered in 2006 as a school. The nursery operates from two upstairs rooms in a converted coachhouse in the grounds of the owner's home in East Farleigh, in Kent. The nursery serves a wide catchment area.

There are currently 44 children from two to five years on roll. This includes 21 funded children. Children attend for a variety of sessions. The setting welcomes children with learning difficulties or disabilities and one child attends who has English as an additional language.

The group opens five days a week during school term times. Sessions are from 09.30 until 12.30 or 13:00 or until 16:00 with some children staying for full days. It is registered to cater for up to 40 children between two years and eight years; of these, not more than 32 may be under five years at any one time. No overnight care is provided.

There are four full time and four part staff who work with the children and a school secretary and caretaker who work for the school and nursery. All the staff working directly with children in the nursery are qualified as Montessori teachers.

The setting receives support from the Local authority.

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PROVISION

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

Children move confidently and in a variety of ways; they respond and move enthusiastically during singing sessions when they confidently perform action songs. Children enjoy using the outdoor areas which are available for nature activities or play and exercise. However, they do not access vigorous physical challenges when they have to remain inside due to inclement weather.

Children can choose when to take their snack which they bring from home. Staff promote healthy foods for snacks and packed lunches by discussing these with parents who provide snacks such as dried and fresh fruits. Children enjoy the social and learning opportunities that are promoted by staff when they sit down for their snack and drink in small groups and at lunchtimes when all children share the dining room. This encourages children to develop healthy eating habits and have good discussions in a social situation. Staff are willing to cook simple foods such as fish fingers, in the microwave, if requested. Staff have enrolled on a food hygiene course to ensure they do this well.

Children play in a clean and tidy environment where there are good routines to ensure toys, resources and equipment are clean and hygienic. They participate in routines, activities and topics that enable them to learn the importance of good hygiene and healthy living. For example, staff prompt hand washing routines before eating and after they use the toilets through reminding children so they do not forget. As a result children's understanding of, and competence in hygiene routines is good.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

Children arrive happily and settle well. They enjoy their play in a warm and welcoming environment decorated with pictures and displays of their work showing that staff value children's contributions. Children are unable to leave the premises without a suitable adult as security of the premises is very good.

Children benefit from playing in an attractive and well organised environment. This allows them to move around and play safely. They have easy and safe access to a varied range of suitable, safe resources which are carefully selected to stimulate them. Resources are skilfully used to enable the children to initiate their own play and all the children are interested because staff support their play and learning effectively. There are sufficient numbers of child sized chairs and tables to allow children to play in flexible groups.

Children learn how to keep themselves safe by tidying away toys and staff give appropriate reminders so that they move around safely. They benefit from regular risk assessments to provide for their safety and are protected by good security systems in the nursery that ensure visitors are recorded and supervised. Children's safety is effectively promoted by the high staff ratios and the good supervision in place. Children and staff have a good understanding of the procedures to follow in the event of a fire because these are regularly practised.

Staff have a clear understanding of the child protection procedures and know what action to take if they have concerns about a child in their care. This enables staff to act in the children's best interest and safeguard their welfare.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

Children who attend the setting are confident and secure. They learn from a varied range of planned activities and good quality resources which provide balance and challenge. Children have relaxed relationships with the staff who have good conversations with them. The organisation of the sessions is good, providing a good balance of individual choices, small group and whole group activities. Children readily participate in whole group times when staff gather them together and ask open ended questions, encouraging children to talk about their experiences and ideas. This is effective in helping staff get to know and understand the children and enabling children to build their confidence and self esteem.

Children enjoy a variety of activities with staff guidance which encourages their confidence to try new activities. They concentrate well when making craft items and are able to relax and chat to friends whilst sharing books. Children make good progress because the staff develop supportive and caring relationships which increase children's sense of trust and help them develop a strong sense of self.

Nursery Education.

The quality of teaching and learning is good.

Children's assessments are regular and frequent and cover their progress in all six areas of the curriculum. The staff ensure that children are assessed during planned and spontaneous activities. Children make good progress because the staff use planned and spontaneous opportunities to encourage their learning. Staff are adept at using child initiated play to extend learning opportunities, such as when children fetch the world map to colour and a staff member introduces information cards into their play to build upon their previous knowledge.

Resources are used skilfully to enable the children to initiate their own play so that children are interested and well motivated. For example, there are well organised systems to encourage the children to plan their own play experiences and they extend these through discussion with staff in one to one, or small group interactions.

Children make good progress in their personal, social and emotional development. They are encouraged to put away resources they use and take themselves to the toilet, developing a sense of responsibility and independence. The staff encourage children to freely discuss their experiences during activities, which enables them develop their confidence and articulate their preferences and ideas. Staff make frequent use of books, reading stories and asking good questions to support children's understanding of vocabulary and listening skills. Children have free access to mark making facilities so that they can name their work; many of the older and more able children are beginning to recognise and write their names competently.

Children confidently participate in mathematical activities. They benefit from good support when using mathematical activities, developing their familiarity with counting and numbers. For example, children take it in turns to lay the dining table each day, laying out the correct number of plates and cups. However, they do not have access to visible numerals to support

their application of these during activities; for instance, when they count the number of children present in the whole group.

Children have access to a varied and attractive natural environment when they play outside and they receive good staff support to extend their understanding of wildlife through activities. For example, children regularly enjoy observing and discussing the care of the beetles and other insects. They also respond with interest and humour when exploring whether materials sink or float. Children's experience of physical challenges is limited by bad weather if they cannot access the outside play area. However, they have interesting opportunities to build upon their understanding of health, using cards and other resources and routines which support a healthy lifestyle. Children's fine motor skills are developing well because they benefit from using a selection of varied sizes of pencils, crayons, glue spreaders, tongs and paintbrushes in everyday activities.

Children particularly enjoy singing action songs and are enthusiastic when performing 'head, shoulders, knees and toes' to a fast tempo. They experience opportunities for imaginative play in the role play area, supported by their use of resources such as the cooking utensils, play cooker and soft toys.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

Children benefit from a range of resources reflecting positive images such as pictures, toys and books which promote a balanced view of society. However, there are limited visible resources reflecting the diversity of languages in the community and the wider world. Staff are fully aware of the individual needs and preferences of all the children and work hard to cater for these.

Children with learning difficulties or disabilities receive sensitive care. Their needs are carefully assessed and individual education plans can be constructed. These note the next steps in learning to promote the development of the child in partnership with parents and other relevant agencies.

Children play harmoniously together and respond positively to staff. They have good relationships with staff who have clear expectations of behaviour and make these explicit in a calm and supportive way. For example, children are encouraged to understand the rules and treat each other with respect through the use of gentle reminders. The setting fosters children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

Partnership with parents and carers is good. Parents are given information on the activities and receive information on the Foundation Stage curriculum and funding. All relevant information is gathered on the registration form to ensure children are cared for according to parents' wishes. Parents receive regular newsletters and are invited to regular consultations when they have opportunities to discuss their children's progress with the staff, focussing on the records of assessment. Staff welcome all parents and share any relevant information on individual achievements. Children take reading books home to read to parents which enhances their confidence and development.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

Children are safeguarded by staff who have been checked and any students who are not fully checked are not left unsupervised with children. Induction training, policies and procedures are well thought through and effective in keeping children healthy, safeguarding their welfare and effectively promoting their learning.

The staff working in the nursery ensure children are safeguarded through good supervision throughout the day, using their skills and knowledge to support each child well. Children enjoy the benefits of effective organisation of space and resources in a secure and attractive environment. Children's welfare and individual needs are well met by the group who have appropriate records in place to support their understanding of each child. All records are kept confidentially, maintaining the child's privacy. The setting meets the needs of the range of children for whom it provides.

Management and Leadership is good.

Staff work effectively as a team, there are clear aims for the provision and staff are committed to providing good quality care and education. There is a strong focus on the personal development and achievement of all children, indicated by the good understanding of how to support child initiated learning. There are secure systems in place for recruiting and employing new staff although there are no formal appraisal systems. A range of staff training is accessed by staff. This is provided by the local authority and Montessori association, supporting the professional development of staff and helping to meet identified needs. Good measures are in place to develop and improve the provision. For example, the school secretary has identified information such as disability discrimination publications available to make possible improvements.

Improvements since the last inspection

At the previous care inspection there were several recommendations made and good progress has been made in addressing these. Children benefit from varied resources portraying disability and gender positively such as, eye patches, books and small world toys. Procedures are implemented positively by all staff so that inclusion is fostered and new children are given sensitive consideration and their confidentiality is protected. Varied plans are in place to cover emergencies such as child protection issues, and uncollected children; and children experience good hygiene procedures.

At the previous inspection for funded nursery education there were recommendations made which have been addressed through extending creative opportunities to allow children to use their imagination and creativity through the use of role play, dance, reciting simple songs and creating their own models using a variety of materials. Children also enjoy regular music and movement activities and successfully build their understanding of healthy lifestyles. Children have some opportunities to use large construction materials.

Complaints since the last inspection

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.

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

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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 there are opportunities for vigorous physical challenges and play when the weather prevents access to the outdoor play area (also applies to nursery education)

The quality and standards of the nursery education

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

- ensure there are resources reflecting diversity of languages in the community (also applies to care)

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