

St Helens Montessori School

Lower Road, East Farleigh, Maidstone, Kent ME15 0JT

Inspection dates

5–7 July 2016

Overall effectiveness

Outstanding

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Outstanding
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Outstanding
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Outstanding
Outcomes for pupils	Outstanding
Early years provision	Outstanding
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Outstanding

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school

- The school complies fully with all the independent school standards.
- The inspirational and dynamic headteacher leads the school with great modesty and skill. Consequently, staff morale is high and she is held in high esteem by parents.
- Leaders at all levels are knowledgeable and enthusiastic, ensuring the very best for those in their care.
- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is outstanding. Pupils benefit from empathetic and expert teaching which supports them to make outstanding progress.
- Personal development and welfare is at the heart of all that is done at the school. Pupils learn routines and procedures to help them become independent, confident young people.
- Pupils' achievement is outstanding. They acquire a wide knowledge and are able to discuss their learning in great depth, showing understanding beyond their years.
- The wide and diverse curriculum allows for all pupils to develop their interests and gain knowledge beyond that expected of their age.
- Behaviour is exemplary. Pupils show care and consideration for each other and for the adults they encounter. They are able to hold sensible and mature conversations.
- Children in the early years are happy, caring and thoughtful. Their behaviour is excellent and they show great concentration and skill in their work.
- The grounds of the school are exceptional and provide a stimulating environment for all pupils.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

- The school meets the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Provide more opportunities for pupils to develop their reasoning skills in mathematics.
- Strengthen communication so that all parents know about and can access additional support offered by the school.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is outstanding

- The headteacher, who is also the proprietor, is driven, committed and enthusiastic. She has created a culture where every child is known and treated as an individual and respected as such. She demands the very best of all her staff, who share in her ethos and vision for the school. She is held in high regard by parents, who say that she is inspirational, compassionate and caring.
- The headteacher knows her school well and areas for improvement are discussed and agreed with all staff. This ensures that staff are fully engaged in and committed to the future development of the school. Consequently, staff morale is high.
- The headteacher leads the school with vigour and rigour. She constantly encourages staff to improve their teaching through regular monitoring, alongside more formal performance management, and motivates them through her dynamic and positive approach. Staff benefit from professional development of the highest quality, including attendance at international conferences.
- Provision for pupils who have special educational needs or disabilities is well led. The special educational needs leader has a good knowledge of these pupils and their needs. She has, together with other staff, ensured that they receive the support necessary to make outstanding progress.
- The extremely broad curriculum covers a variety of subjects including Latin, French, horticulture and zoology. It is complemented by a wide range of extra-curricular activities such as recorder, piano, construction, judo and chess. All these activities are very well attended. Specialist drama and music teachers are employed to ensure pupils receive expert tuition in these areas. A dress rehearsal of a play was observed during the inspection and the quality of the performance was exceptional for such young children. A large multi-use games area (MUGA) has been installed to ensure that outdoor games can take place throughout the year. In the summer term all pupils have lessons in the school's swimming pool.
- Pupils are prepared very well for life in modern Britain. They vote in a secret ballot for prefects, raise money for the Poppy Appeal and support orphanages and nurseries in Malawi. They have thought about what makes them proud to be British and learned about the Queen through celebrating her birthday.
- Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is embedded extremely well throughout the curriculum, and there are many opportunities available for pupils to work together and learn about other cultures and festivals. Pupils are able to develop their spirituality in assemblies, where they have time to reflect and say prayers. The tending of the chickens encourages both social and moral development as children discuss whether to eat the eggs laid or incubate them.
- The school is held in high regard by parents. They appreciate that links have been forged with the wider community. For example, the neighbouring owner of an apple nursery is working with the school to develop a new variety of apple.
- Communication with parents is strong, through the open door policy, and parents know that they can see a teacher whenever they have a concern and telephone to talk to someone as well. The very dedicated staff manage this well, although it is demanding of their time. While the school used to support parents further through delivering a series of focused talks, these have not happened recently. The school also lends books to parents to help them understand the method of teaching in the school on request. However, not all parents are aware of this opportunity.
- Leaders promote equality of opportunity and diversity and this has resulted in a calm environment where all are respected.
- The vast majority of parents are completely satisfied with the behaviour of pupils at the school. A written complaint regarding bullying was considered alongside other evidence. At the time of the inspection, the inspector did not find any foundation to the concern raised.
- School leaders have ensured that all the independent school standards are met.
- **The governance of the school**
 - There is no governance as such in the school. The proprietor and school leaders at various levels govern themselves and take full responsibility for the quality of the school. However, there are clear processes and procedures in place which enable them to be held to account for their work. The ethos of the school is such that all staff are willing to challenge each other and the headteacher. This ensures that the school moves from strength to strength.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. All staff are trained to a high level and have undertaken prevention of radicalisation training. The two designated safeguarding officers are well informed and dedicated. All staff have the welfare of the pupils at the heart of all they do and are acutely aware of the

need to be vigilant. Effective systems and good relationships promote a safe culture in school. The site is extremely well maintained and secure.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment **is outstanding**

- All staff are Montessori trained and therefore there is a consistent approach to teaching throughout the school. Staff have an outstanding knowledge of the topics they teach and, through good questioning, ensure that pupils' understanding is developed very well.
- All teachers have an excellent understanding and awareness of pupils' abilities and aptitudes. They keep comprehensive records of their learning each day. This helps them to plan effectively for individual pupils' learning. This ensures that anyone who may be falling behind is instantly supported to catch up.
- An area for development in the last report concerned peer assessment. Pupils frequently discuss their work or read passages to their classmates who comment critically and supportively. This area has been developed as far as is appropriate in this setting and with the current age range.
- Pupils know how to improve their work through the one-to-one support they receive from their teachers. This individual approach ensures that all pupils are able to make progress at an accelerated rate and achieve the very highest standards.
- Pupils are committed and motivated to learn. Even the youngest children show high levels of concentration. They are all keen to improve their skills and understanding and show an exceptional thirst for knowledge. Teachers capitalise on pupils' interests to develop their knowledge and move them forward. For example, when learning about plants, pupils became interested in the different types of tap roots. Teachers therefore planned a series of lessons focused on this.
- Classrooms are bright, warm and welcoming environments. They are well equipped with resources of a high quality. Consequently, pupils are keen to use the equipment to help them learn new skills.
- There is a structured approach to the teaching of reading using a range of strategies, including phonics (letters and the sounds they make). As a result, pupils read enthusiastically and enjoy learning new words. The vast majority read fluently at an early age.
- Creative writing is a favourite subject of many pupils, in particular the boys. Pupils write with feeling and imagination, using their knowledge of spelling, grammar and punctuation. A Year 2 pupil wrote the phrase 'It was just as she imagined', showing great maturity of thought.
- A range of good-quality equipment helps pupils to develop their understanding in mathematics. For example, one boy was using an abacus to help him add numbers beyond a million. Pupils are given time to master concepts but at present there are limited opportunities for them to develop their reasoning skills in this subject.
- Parents are provided with a comprehensive and detailed written annual report. Due to the close relationship that staff have with parents, updates on learning are given almost daily when parents drop off or collect their children. Parents are given individual guidance about how to support their child to improve.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare **is outstanding**

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding and is at the heart of all the school does. Pupils are polite, friendly and respectful and show that they care about each other. For example, in a Nursery class, a young girl dropped her hair slide. Another child across the room saw this and quietly, without fuss, picked it up and gave it back to the girl. 'Thank you' was said without any prompting.
- Relationships between pupils and staff are warm and mutually respectful.
- Pupils feel safe at all times, and know how to keep safe, especially when using the internet. This is confirmed by parents who agree that their children are safe and well looked after at the school.
- Pupils enjoy having responsibility. The head boy and girl are ably supported by the two prefects and a behaviour monitor to ensure that all pupils behave well and keep safe. Due to the outstanding behaviour of pupils and the exacting safety measures in place at the school, they say that they find this part of their job 'easy'.

- Pupils can explain clearly how to keep themselves healthy, explaining in detail about the five food groups and the need to drink water alongside a healthy diet and exercise. Activities such as growing fruit and vegetables and keeping chickens support pupils' understanding of healthy eating.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding. This is confirmed by both parents and pupils, who have no concerns and struggled to think of any instances of poor behaviour. Pupils are confident that if these did arise, staff would deal with such behaviour efficiently and effectively.
- Attitudes to learning are exemplary. Pupils exhibit a real love of learning and cannot wait to start working each day. They are eager to learn and to challenge themselves. They focus well on the tasks they have chosen to do and show a high degree of resilience. As a result, progress is rapid and sustained.
- Attendance is above average. Pupils love attending school, rarely missing a day unless they are ill.
- Pupils are exceptionally confident and mature. They exhibit a high degree of independence. Consequently, pupils are eager to discuss what they are learning with visitors, and to include visitors in their school life.
- Respect and courtesy are paramount to the ethos of the school and staff are exemplary role models for pupils. This is recognised by parents, who appreciate the good manners of their children and the routines and procedures which have been put in place. For example, pupils are taught to clear away after eating, which they do without prompting. Parents particularly appreciate that their children have been taught how to make breakfast and wash up.
- Pupils listen to each other carefully and show respect for each other in what they say. They take turns and work well both as individuals and in small groups.

Outcomes for pupils

are outstanding

- Pupils make excellent progress from their starting points. Attainment is outstanding and compares extremely well with that of other pupils with similar starting points. Outcomes are consistently high.
- Achievement at the end of key stage 1 is well above national expectations.
- In 2016, all children achieved a good level of development in the early years foundation stage profile and this is well above the national average.
- The school tracks pupils' achievements on a daily basis. This ensures that any that need to catch up are noted and provision is immediately put in place to support them. As a result, all pupils achieve to a high standard and make outstanding progress. The most able are encouraged to develop their interests and consequently make exceptional progress.
- Those pupils who have special educational needs or disabilities are supported well and as a result make progress in line with that of their peers.
- Progress in English and mathematics is excellent throughout the school. Pupils make rapid progress and attain high results in English because of outstanding teaching and close attention to accurate spelling, punctuation and grammar.
- Pupils excel in reading and the vast majority read fluently and expressively at an early age. They skilfully use their knowledge of phonics to work out new words and are undaunted by challenging texts.
- Pupils talk about their learning in an extremely confident and articulate manner. They show exceptional understanding of a wide variety of topics and engage in conversations of a high level with adults.

Early years provision

is outstanding

- Leadership of the foundation stage is strong. Leaders talk passionately and enthusiastically about provision. They have taken positive actions to address the area for development from the previous report concerning assessment. As a result, staff are able to monitor closely each child's progress against the expected goals of the early years foundation stage framework.
- Leaders' assessments of children's progress and achievement are accurate. It is common for all children to achieve a good level of development, with many children exceeding expectations. Children who have special educational needs or disabilities are extremely well supported and make outstanding progress.

- The outdoor area is now inspiring. Children engage in a wide range of activities and the addition of an outdoor classroom has ensured that the area is well used. Children use the outdoor equipment with confidence and skill. Children also use the MUGA to support their physical development.
- Children in the early years are curious, enthusiastic learners. Their personal development is exceptional. Children are confident and happy; they mix well and have impressive attitudes to learning.
- Children's language development is excellent. They rapidly acquire a wide and sophisticated vocabulary. Their reading and writing are impressive, as is their development of number skills. Mathematics, literacy and phonics teaching is strong, as teachers have high expectations and are good role models for children. As a result, they are well prepared for the next stage of their education.
- Children use the excellent displays to enhance their learning. For example, one display shows the continents of the world and artefacts are placed on the wall to show life on these continents. Children are encouraged to play with these objects to extend their understanding of cultural diversity.
- Parents are extremely positive about their children's experience in the early years. Parents who spoke to the inspector reported that they have every confidence in the teachers who, they believe, focus on developing each individual child through a holistic approach. They all state that their children have become more confident and independent since starting at the school.
- Behaviour within the early years setting is exemplary. Clear routines have been established and children respond quickly and quietly to instructions. They are courteous and very independent.
- Children's excellent behaviour and enthusiasm demonstrate that they feel exceptionally safe and secure. Staff are highly alert to children's welfare and all statutory requirements are met, including the independent school standards.
- The school invests a considerable amount of time and energy in ensuring that children have a smooth start to their life at school. Children make a number of pre-visits according to need before they start Nursery. Parents are encouraged to stay with their child if necessary when they first start school, and are able to phone the school for reassurance when they leave their child. The school will often phone parents to reassure them that their child has settled well.

School details

Unique reference number	131567
Inspection number	10008566
DfE registration number	886/6113
Type of school	Montessori day nursery and primary
School status	Independent school
Age range of pupils	2–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	63
Number of part-time pupils	38
Proprietor	Jeannelle Dening-Smitherman
Chair	N/A
Headteacher	Jeannelle Dening-Smitherman
Annual fees (day pupils)	£19 per session in Nursery; From £6,840 per annum in Elementary
Telephone number	01622 721 731
Website	www.sthelensmontessori.co.uk
Email address	office@sthelensmontessori.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	24 June 2010

Information about this school

- St Helens Montessori School is an independent day school. It is a Christian school although children of all faiths are accepted.
- The school follows the Montessori approach where pupils work individually most of the time; they have free access to a range of Montessori materials appropriate to their age and they are encouraged to be independent learners.
- The school was founded by the proprietor in 1989. It is located in a coach house surrounded by five acres of grounds in a rural setting in East Farleigh.
- It admits boys and girls from two to 11 years old. However, at the time of this inspection, the oldest pupils were aged nine.
- The school is registered to accept 130 pupils on roll although at the time of inspection there were 64 on roll in the school. Thirty-eight children were in the Nursery classes and 25 in the Elementary classes.
- There are no children who have an education, health and care plan or statement of special educational needs and the majority of children are of White British origin.
- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- The school was last inspected in June 2010.

Information about this inspection

- This inspection was carried out with one day's notice.
- The inspector observed lessons in all classes.
- The inspector also spoke to the headteacher, staff and two groups of parents.
- The inspector met with two groups of pupils, in addition to speaking to pupils in lessons and around the school site. A work sample was scrutinised and the inspector also examined pupils' work in lessons.
- The inspector heard pupils read.
- The inspector reviewed a range of documentation and policies to check compliance with the independent school standards.
- Forty-six responses to Parent View, the Ofsted online questionnaire, were taken into account. The nine responses to the staff questionnaire were evaluated as part of the evidence base.

Inspection team

Barbara Chevis, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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