

# The Meadows Montessori School

Independent school inspection report

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DCSF registration number 935/6226  
Unique reference number 135689  
Inspection number 342510  
Inspection dates 24-25 November 2009  
Reporting inspector Judith Charlesworth

This inspection of the school was carried out under Section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as amended.

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Age group: 4-11

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## Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out by Ofsted under Section 162A<sup>1</sup> of the Education Act 2002, as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005<sup>2</sup>, 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.

## Information about the school

The Meadows is an independent day school catering for up to 40 pupils aged four to 11 years. It follows the Montessori educational philosophy and methodology which is used as a context for teaching the curriculum subjects. The Montessori philosophy believes that teaching and learning starts with each child's individual interests and aptitudes. Children are given the freedom to make choices, learn and progress at their own individual rate in clear, well-ordered indoor and outdoor environments that are designed specially for them.

The school opened in September 2008 as a continuation of the separate Montessori-based pre-school provision owned by the proprietor. This is located on the same site and was judged to be outstanding at its last inspection in November 2007. There are currently 16 pupils on roll at The Meadows, six of whom are in the Reception age group of the Early Years Foundation Stage. These children share a classroom with five pupils in Year 1. The five pupils in Year 2 and above have a separate classroom.

The school is situated on the outskirts of Ipswich, in the grounds of a large sports centre. Its prime aim is 'to provide a safe, happy, stable environment where children can develop to their full potential, becoming confident, competent learners'. This is the school's first inspection.

## Evaluation of the school

The school provides good quality education for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage and in Year 1 and above. The curriculum and teaching for both age groups are good and successfully combine the Montessori methodology with the Early Years Foundation Stage and National Curriculum, as appropriate to pupils' ages. The school has a supportive, nurturing ethos which makes a strong contribution to pupils' good personal development. Their behaviour and relationships are outstanding. Suitable procedures ensure that pupils are properly safeguarded. However, some of the policies and practices relating to the safety, health and welfare of pupils do not meet requirements and this aspect is inadequate. The school meets most, but not all of the regulations for registration.

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<sup>1</sup> [www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2002/ukpga\\_20020032\\_en\\_14#pt10-ch1-pb4-l1g162](http://www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2002/ukpga_20020032_en_14#pt10-ch1-pb4-l1g162)

<sup>2</sup> [www.opsi.gov.uk/ACTS/acts2005/ukpga\\_20050018\\_en\\_15#sch8](http://www.opsi.gov.uk/ACTS/acts2005/ukpga_20050018_en_15#sch8)

## Quality of education

The curriculum and quality of teaching are good and pupils make good progress. Almost all parents returned the Ofsted questionnaire and showed unanimous support for the school, the provision it offers and the progress their children make.

The school successfully uses the Montessori methodology to underpin teaching and learning in the curriculum subjects. These stem from the National Curriculum and are organised in the six Montessori areas of learning: practical life, sensorial, language, mathematics, cultural and creative. Teachers have good subject knowledge which enables them to draw out and extend pupils' knowledge and understanding, and to work effectively within the school's two curricular frameworks. Relationships with pupils are outstanding. Behaviour management is 'invisible' and staff maintain a warm, calm but interesting atmosphere. Lessons are well planned, and generally promote pupils' independence and intellectual effort. However, too much work is done on separate pieces of paper which does not always allow a systematic review of work or progress by either staff or pupils. Occasionally, staff rely too much on pre-prepared work sheets rather than allowing pupils to decide how to present their work for themselves.

Staff know each pupil very well and an individual approach is taken to learning. Half-termly plans are set for each pupil in literacy and numeracy. These are supported by a high quality, detailed target-setting system that includes in-built assessment. This enables pupils to know exactly what they must do or learn next to improve. Literacy and numeracy are further supported by the use of specific Montessori equipment that is designed to help children learn and consolidate their skills independently, and to recognise and correct their own mistakes. The combination of these factors, together with the impact of good teaching, small groups and pupils' very positive attitude to work and learning means that they make rapid progress. Assessment using National Curriculum level descriptors shows that some individuals have made twice the progress expected in literacy and numeracy since they joined the school and most are already working at levels above expectations for their age. The methodology allows pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities to have work tailored to suit their needs in exactly the same way as other pupils which supports the highly inclusive ethos of the school. They, too, make good progress.

The curriculum is enriched by whole-school celebrations and activities, for example cooking outdoors for bonfire night, visitors to school such as a mobile planetarium, and after-school clubs. Music and physical education are taught as separate lessons, but most other subjects are taught in a less structured way through commercially available topics and the Montessori 'Great Lessons'. These do not have such clear learning targets as the literacy and numeracy work, and formal assessment of progress is minimal. It is the school's intention that the topics, to an extent, follow paths directed by the pupils' interests. Research using books and the internet form an important part of this work and discussions following pupils' feedback on their findings are usually wide-ranging. It is clear that pupils learn a great deal in these lessons, but there is no formal way of showing or assessing this learning which means that pupils might have unidentified gaps in their skills, knowledge and

understanding. Topics are planned to ensure a balance of subject emphasis over time, for example a history-based topic is currently underway; a science-based topic will follow. However, the school has not developed a means of tracking subject coverage within topics to ensure that all required areas of learning are properly addressed.

Pupils' organisational and independence skills are supported very effectively by Montessori 'journals'. In these, teachers write two or three tasks for pupils to complete during the course of a journal session which usually extends for the whole morning. Pupils choose the order in which to do these tasks, and when they take their breaks. The only proviso is that they must get them done. The pupils organise their own time, negotiate with friends when they can have playtime together, and become responsible for their own work and progress. The pupils are given good, immediate support as necessary and when new concepts are introduced or need reinforcement. Pupils' personal development and their technological, physical and problem solving skills are very effectively supported by the well-planned use of the outdoors as an additional learning environment.

## Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

The pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Their personal development is strongly supported by the child-centred Montessori ethos, outstanding relationships and the staff's commitment to providing an environment that supports all aspects of pupils' development.

The pupils develop close relationships with each other. These extend across age, gender and ability groups and promote the pupils' social development very effectively. They work very well together in pairs or small groups, particularly when solving the challenges set by staff or reporting back the outcomes of research. They make a good contribution to the school community, for example by volunteering to spread bark on their playground during their breaks, but opportunities to extend this into the local community are limited at the moment. Nevertheless, staff work hard to support pupils' cultural development and extend their horizons on a national and global level. The school participates in events such as National Poetry Day, Chinese New Year, Diwali and Christmas celebrations. Topics often include global aspects, such as voyages, exports and imports in Tudor times. Pupils sponsor a boy living in Botswana, initiated during World Orphan Week, and raised money for Africa on Red Nose Day.

Parents' comments indicate that some children joined the school with low self-esteem as a result of past experiences. However, pupils clearly blossom as a result of the school's supportive, inclusive provision, and their self-confidence, self-esteem, compassion and respect for others and the environment develop rapidly. Currently, though, there is little opportunity for pupils to actively consider deeper emotional, spiritual and moral issues. Pupils are proud of their achievements and understand

school rules, and the basic institutions, services and rules of a democratic society. Their enjoyment of school is reflected in good progress and attendance and outstanding behaviour that derives from within rather than as a result of external control. The pupils are well prepared for their future economic well-being and for taking their place in society as fully contributing members.

## Welfare, health and safety of the pupils

The school's provision in this area is inadequate because some of the required policies, for example on bullying and child protection, are not written to take account of relevant guidance. Policy implementation is not systematically monitored or reviewed. Consequently, some practices are inconsistently carried out or are subject to conflicting written advice. There is no suitable fire risk audit. Some training has not been carried out or has lapsed, for example basic child protection for some staff. Some administrative tasks are incomplete, such as systematic storage and full, dated entries in various records. The school does not have a three year plan to increase accessibility to the building, curriculum and information as required by the Disability Discrimination Act 2002. Several regulations are not met.

Nevertheless, the school's consideration of pupils' enjoyment and well-being is good and this makes an important contribution to their personal development. The pupils enjoy many opportunities for physical activity. They happily use the outdoor area safely in all weathers, and full waterproofs and boots are an important part of the school uniform. The pupils have free access to water, milk and fruit, and the curriculum supports their growing knowledge of healthy eating and living, for example in the provision of after school clubs and vegetable growing. Activities often include some well-chosen and supervised risks that the pupils must negotiate, such as stacking wooden platforms in order to reach items stuck (deliberately) in trees. Pupils are kind to one another and feel safe in school because there is no bullying and relationships with adults are outstanding. Parents are overwhelmingly confident that their children enjoy school and that it helps them stay safe, healthy and happy.

## Suitability of the proprietor and staff

All adults are appropriately checked with the Criminal Records Bureau to assure their suitability for working with children. All but one other required check is made before staff are appointed, and that is a check on their medical fitness. This regulation is therefore not met.

## School's premises and accommodation

The school is housed in a large, new, double demountable building which provides two very spacious classrooms, an entry hall with a library and adequate toilet

facilities. A small kitchen area is included in the classroom for older pupils and facilities for sick pupils are in the nearby nursery building. Some freshly cooked hot lunches are provided by the co-located nursery. Pupils have immediate access to a compact, safe, very well furnished outdoor area which is continuously and very effectively used to provide appropriate, exciting learning experiences. The school also has access to the sports centre's facilities, which include acres of green field, and various indoor facilities. The school is designed to provide full access to anyone with a physical disability. It is maintained very well, clean and tidy, and in very good decorative order. The school is furnished in neutral tones, including a considerable amount of natural wood, and has an uncluttered feel. Displays are deliberately low-key. These features derive from the Montessori methodology and do much to promote the warm, safe, calm learning environment.

## Provision of information for parents, carers and others

The school has a simple prospectus, a parents' information pack for new entrants and a website which holds further information including the main policies. These information sources are clear, easy to read and generally up to date. Personal contact with parents is important to the school and brief conversations are held with parents at the start and end of each day as pupils are welcomed into school. Bright newsletters and notices posted at the school gate keep parents informed about whole-school events and celebrations. The Ofsted questionnaires show that parents are very happy with the information provided about events and their children's progress. One regulation is not met. The annual reports to parents of pupils in Year 1 and above do not report on the attainment and progress of pupils in either all the subjects taught, or in all of the six Montessori core areas of learning.

## Procedures for handling complaints

The policy and procedure for handling complaints meet all regulations, and there have been no complaints since the school opened.

## Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Provision for this age group is good and all learning and development requirements for the Early Years Foundation Stage are met. Leadership and management are good and staff review their practice regularly in order to improve provision. Almost all the welfare requirements are met, although some of the weaknesses in the school's policies and practices apply equally to the Early Years Foundation Stage.

The Early Years Foundation Stage maintains its uniqueness while at the same time remaining an integral part of the school. Close liaison with parents and the linked pre-school setting ensure that children have a smooth entry into school. Parents' Ofsted questionnaire returns show that they are overwhelmingly happy with the provision. Children settle very quickly and enjoy the welcoming atmosphere of the

class and the challenges set for them, for example den building in the outdoor area. The children's welfare and well-being are given high priority. Consequently, they feel safe, enjoy school and make good progress in their learning and personal development. The Year 1 pupils act as good role models for the younger children, and friendships and working partnerships extend freely across the two ages, and across the whole school 'family'.

The quality of provision is good. The curriculum is well planned and successfully combines the Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum and the Montessori methodology. Central to both of these is the provision of activities supported by careful observations of the children's interests and abilities. To this end, the school has developed good planning systems that underpin the good teaching and provision. They ensure that an appropriate balance of stable continuous provision, adult-led and child-initiated activities is provided. An outstanding computerised assessment system allows staff to track children's progress towards and beyond the early learning goals, and to plan activities that further their progress. Assessment data shows that children are on track to achieve, and mostly exceed the early learning goals by the time they move into Year 1.

## Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school meets all of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as amended ('the Regulations'), with the exception of those listed below.<sup>3</sup>

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of provision for pupils' welfare, health and safety (standard 3) and must:

- prepare and implement a written policy to prevent bullying which has regard to the DCSF guidance Safe to Learn: Embedding anti-bullying work in schools (DCSF-00656-2007)<sup>4</sup> (paragraph 3(2)(a))
- prepare and implement written policies to safeguard and promote the welfare of children who are pupils at the school in compliance with DCSF guidance Safeguarding children and safer recruitment in education (DCSF-04217-2006)<sup>5</sup> (paragraph 3(2)(b))
- ensure the school has a satisfactory level of fire safety, in compliance with the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005<sup>6</sup> (paragraph 3(5))

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<sup>3</sup> [www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si2003/20031910.htm](http://www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si2003/20031910.htm)

<sup>4</sup> [www.teachernet.gov.uk/\\_doc/11908/SAFE%20TO%20LEARN.pdf](http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/_doc/11908/SAFE%20TO%20LEARN.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> <http://publications.teachernet.gov.uk/eOrderingDownload/Final%206836-SafeGuard.Chd%20bkmk.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> [www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si2005/20051541.htm](http://www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si2005/20051541.htm)



- prepare and implement a satisfactory written policy on first aid (paragraph 3(6))
- maintain an attendance register in accordance with the Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006<sup>7</sup> (paragraph 3(9)).

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of suitability of proprietor and staff (standard 4) and must:

- prior to the confirmation of the appointment of all staff, carry out appropriate checks to confirm their medical fitness (paragraph 4(2)(a)).

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of the provision of information for parents, carers and others (standard 6) and must:

- provide parents with an annual written report of the progress and attainment of their children in the main subject areas taught (except where a parent has agreed otherwise) (paragraph 6(6)).

In order to comply with the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 as amended the school should devise a three-year accessibility plan.<sup>8</sup>

In order to comply with the welfare requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage, the school must:

- ensure they are taken fully into consideration when developing, implementing and reviewing policies and practices that apply to both age groups in the school.

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<sup>7</sup> [www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si2006/20061751.htm](http://www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si2006/20061751.htm)

<sup>8</sup> [www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts1995/ukpga\\_19950050\\_en\\_1](http://www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts1995/ukpga_19950050_en_1)

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?		✓		

The quality of boarding provision *(leave blank if not applicable)*

Evaluation of boarding provision				
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## School details

Name of school	The Meadows Montessori School		
DCSF number	935/6226		
Unique reference number	135689		
Type of school	Montessori		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	15 September 2008		
Age range of pupils	4-11		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 11	Girls: 5	Total: 16
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need	Boys: 0	Girls: 1	Total: 1
Annual fees (day pupils)	£4500		
Address of school	316 Tuddenham Road Ipswich IP4 3QJ		
Telephone number	01473 233782		
Fax number	NA		
Email address	info@themeadowsmontessori.com		
Headteacher	Samantha Sims		
Proprietor	Samantha Sims		
Reporting inspector	Judith Charlesworth		
Dates of inspection	24-25 November 2009		