

St Helens Montessori

St Helens, East Farleigh, Maidstone, Kent ME15 0JT

Inspection dates

6–8 November 2018

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an inadequate school

- The proprietor, who is also the headteacher, provides sole governance of the school and has not ensured that all the independent school standards are met.
- Systems or procedures in place are not effective in calling leaders to account for the welfare and safety of pupils. As a result, the school's actions to promote pupils' welfare are inadequate.
- There is insufficient understanding of assessing risk, including following statutory requirements for fire safety.
- Checks on the suitability of adults to work at the school are not carried out as rigorously as they should be.
- Leaders have not made sure that training for staff is effective in enabling them to have up-to-date knowledge on how to keep pupils safe.
- School policies and procedures are not checked regularly enough. Most policies are out of date, including the safeguarding policy.
- Leaders' roles and responsibilities are not clear.
- As in the rest of the school, early years provision is inadequate because of unmet independent school standards. Nevertheless, children get off to a flying start in the nursery and learn well.

The school has the following strengths

- Parents and carers highly recommend the school. They are unanimous in their view that the school provides very well for their children.
- Pupils are happy, unfailingly polite, and rarely miss a day at school.
- Teaching, learning and assessment are outstanding. Pupils are inspired by the rich curriculum and are highly motivated to learn. As a consequence, pupils make exceptional progress in their learning and attain high standards.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school must take action to meet the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 and associated requirements. The details are listed in the annex to the full report.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Urgently improve arrangements to keep pupils safe by:
 - reviewing governance arrangements so that oversight of safeguarding improves significantly
 - initiating fail-safe procedures so that all the necessary pre-employment checks on staff are always carried out and recorded on the single central register
 - updating the safeguarding policy, ensuring that it takes into account latest guidance from the Secretary of State
 - ensuring that staff have training regularly in order that they know the latest requirements in keeping children safe
 - ensuring that health and safety requirements, including for fire-risk assessment, are managed effectively and meet statutory guidance
 - ensuring that medical-room arrangements meet the required standards.
- Improve leadership and management by:
 - ensuring that leaders and those responsible for governance develop a strong understanding of the independent school standards
 - ensuring that all leaders have a clear job description and understand their roles and responsibilities, especially in keeping pupils safe
 - ensuring that leaders and those responsible for governance maintain an accurate view of the school's performance
 - leaders developing action plans that set out exactly what steps to take and how to measure the success of their intended actions
 - ensuring that school policies are kept up to date.
- The school must meet the independent school standards, as set out in the annex of this report.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Inadequate

- Since the last inspection, the headteacher, who is also the proprietor, has not made rigorous enough checks on the effectiveness of systems to keep pupils safe. There are serious shortcomings in safeguarding policies and procedures.
- School leaders are not fully aware of the independent school standards. Leaders do not have an accurate view of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. At the time of the inspection, the school self-evaluation document and action plan had not been updated for over two years. Consequently, there is not sufficient regard to making plans to improve the school, and a number of independent school standards are not met.
- Nevertheless, the headteacher communicates a clear vision to ensure that pupils are provided with the highest-quality opportunities to learn skills and explore the world around them. Staff consistently promote a pupil-centred culture of learning and have high expectations of what pupils can achieve. They collaborate effectively together so morale is high.
- Leaders monitor the quality of teaching and learning very closely. Staff are highly trained in Montessori teaching methods and have ample opportunity to hone their skills. They are determined to ensure that their teaching practice is of the highest quality. The headteacher makes sure that staff receive continual feedback on the strengths and weaknesses of their teaching. As a result, teaching is highly effective.
- The curriculum ensures that pupils' development is catered for very well. The humanities, together with creative and technological subjects, are seamlessly woven through the core curriculum of reading, writing and mathematics. Leaders have developed an interesting range of extra-curricular activities, including chess, judo and gardening. Regular trips and visits supplement pupils' learning experience well. For example, a recent visit to an astronomy observatory ignited pupils' interest in the solar system, enhancing the science curriculum.
- Leaders have fostered pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding effectively. Pupils understand others' needs and accept each other's differences. Pupils express their views sensitively and show kindness towards others.
- Parents are highly supportive of the school. All parents responding to Ofsted's online questionnaire would recommend the school to others. They hold the staff and headteacher in the highest regard. An active parents' association provides support in the form of fundraising initiatives. One parental comment, typical of many, stated: 'St Helens Montessori gives my child the self-confidence and knowledge she needs to make her way through life.'

Governance

- The proprietor, who is also the headteacher, provides sole governance of the school. Most school policies have not been updated recently. The proprietor has not made sure that the independent school standards are met consistently.
- Because of systematic and embedded procedures that have been in place over many years, governance monitors the quality of teaching effectively. This level of scrutiny is not

replicated across all functions of the school, and, accordingly, governance is inadequate overall.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are not effective. The safeguarding culture is not strong enough, because leaders and staff are not clear about their responsibilities in keeping pupils safe. The safeguarding policy has not been updated or published on the school website as is required. Leaders have not kept up to date with statutory information issued by the Secretary of State about safeguarding. Staff have not received timely or effective training. As a consequence, staff do not have a clear understanding of latest guidance in keeping pupils safe.
- At the time of the inspection, leaders had not carried out the statutory checks sufficiently well on all staff working with the children. This is in part due to leaders not having up-to-date training about recruiting staff.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Outstanding

- Teaching is highly effective and staff know their pupils extremely well. The school ethos to allow pupils to take ownership of their learning is firmly embedded across all age groups. Teaching nurtures, supports and encourages pupils very effectively. Teachers allow pupils to follow their interests and fuel their thirst for knowledge. Consequently, outstanding teaching enables pupils to develop and sustain a love of learning.
- Pupils are very adept at choosing learning activities for themselves. Teachers provide constant and effective feedback to pupils. Should they fall behind in an area of learning, swift and supportive prompting enables pupils to get back on track. Teachers have consistently high expectations of what pupils can achieve. No time is wasted during lessons. In this way, teaching ensures that all pupils make very strong progress.
- Teachers are highly skilled in asking questions to deepen pupils' learning. Staff expertly guide pupils, embedding their existing understanding and extending new learning. Pupils say: 'Teachers never give us the answers because we have to find out for ourselves.' Teaching constantly demands more of pupils.
- Because teachers expect pupils to explain their understanding, they develop highly eloquent speaking skills. Pupils are very articulate, and from a young age are able to explain their point of view confidently to an audience.
- Teaching develops pupils' writing skills very effectively. Pupils receive clear guidance on grammar, punctuation and spelling. Adults spark pupils' imagination to write at length.
- Teaching in mathematics, across the year groups, is also extremely effective. Pupils practise their numeracy skills, often using equipment that aids their understanding very well. Since the last inspection, leaders have developed more opportunity for pupils to practise and explain their problem-solving skills. Pupils achieve very well in mathematics.
- Because pupils develop a continual sense of curiosity, learning continues during breaks and at home. Leaders have developed a highly engaging outside play area where pupils explore the world around them. A recently added activity centre provides opportunity for pupils to investigate properties of materials and simple equipment. Older pupils experiment, for example using separation techniques to collect mud particles and using

the resulting clay to make models. Pupils organise themselves very well and practise skills from across the curriculum.

- Science teaching concentrates on developing pupils' knowledge and understanding of botany and zoology extremely well. Pupils learn about the biological world very effectively through their own observations and research in books. Teaching supports pupils' understanding of chemistry and physics, although pupils' misconceptions of basic principles are not always corrected. For example, pupils construct electromagnets when studying magnetism, yet have little understanding of basic electricity.
- Leaders ensure that there is effective, individualised support for the minority of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Teachers know their pupils' needs well and ensure that they provide exactly the right experiences for them. Accurate analysis of improvements in learning enables teachers to adapt support accordingly. As a result, pupils with SEND make extremely strong progress.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Inadequate

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is inadequate. Leaders have not ensured that safeguarding practice follows statutory requirements. Consequently, pupils' welfare is not sufficiently provided for.
- Leaders have not made sure that health and safety procedures meet requirements. For example, a fire-risk assessment had not been carried out on a recently built extension. Leaders' checks on the hot water temperature in handbasins are not effective. The temperature is too high. Accommodation for the short-term care of sick or injured pupils does not meet requirements.
- Pupils know how to keep themselves safe when using the computer or when outside on the road. However, they have not got enough understanding about the dangers of extreme views or radicalisation.
- Pupils report that they feel safe. They are confident that, should they have a problem, staff would resolve it. Pupils say that the school is like a family. Older pupils look after their younger peers and are very positive role models. Pupils report that there is no bullying.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding.
- Pupils are highly motivated. Pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school is exemplary. They are courteous and respectful to each other and adults. They are confident learners and take a great pride in their work and their school.
- Pupils value their education and rarely miss a day at school.
- Parents say that pupils are extremely polite, one commenting that the school promotes 'a positive vibe'.

Outcomes for pupils

Outstanding

- Pupils learn in mixed-age-group classes. The individual systematic approach to learning enables pupils to make rapid and sustained progress. There are no limits to what or how quickly pupils learn. Pupils, including the most able, thrive at this school and achieve high standards across a wide range of skills.
- Teachers' highly detailed assessment records pinpoint pupils' achievement precisely. The evidence of pupils' development is scrutinised regularly to ensure that pupils make strong progress.
- Pupils are avid readers. Pupils use their phonics knowledge well to pronounce words properly. Pupils have a genuine love of books, and many read challenging texts, including the classics, that stretch their understanding. Pupils relish the opportunity to write for a variety of purposes. Their writing demonstrates style, grammatical accuracy and a very wide vocabulary. Pupils demonstrate a reading and writing ability far beyond their chronological age.
- Pupils possess strong mathematical skills and they understand calculation methods and other mathematical concepts very well. Pupils apply their mathematical skills extremely well when solving problems.
- Work in pupils' books and discussions with pupils show that they make outstanding progress across the curriculum. Pupils are very knowledgeable about British history, and have well-developed geography skills and language skills, shown, for example, in writing sentences accurately in French. All pupils belong to the school choir and learn to read music at an early age.
- Pupils' levels of attainment are above age-related expectations. Pupils' growing independence, resilience and curiosity to learn provides them with the personal skills to deal with challenges confidently. Pupils are exceptionally well prepared for their next stage of learning.

Early years provision

Inadequate

- Leaders have not ensured that the arrangements for safeguarding in early years are effective. There are unmet independent school standards. As a result, early years provision is inadequate.
- While there are shortcomings in the leadership of safeguarding, leaders ensure that staff are trained effectively so that children learn well.
- Pupils enter the nursery with skills and knowledge that are typical for their age. They get off to a flying start because teachers get to know children well and provide an educational experience that closely meets their needs.
- Classrooms and the outside areas are filled with resources to stimulate children's curiosity. Mostly, children initiate their own learning. Although adults provide close supervision they are careful not to intervene, but rather encourage the children to become independent learners by investigating for themselves. Provision for two-year-olds is excellent.

- Staff keep meticulous records to plot children's progress across a variety of skills. Great care is taken to make sure that children have a range of learning activities. Should adults notice that a child has a particular learning difficulty, staff provide exactly the right experiences to overcome any barrier to learning.
- Children make rapid progress in their early reading and writing skills. The teaching of phonics is excellent. Well-planned activities enable children to make progress linking letters to sounds. Children are keen to 'have a go' and gain immense pleasure when they find things out for themselves.
- Children's behaviour is exemplary. The nursery is a calm haven. From a young age, children display excellent attitudes to learning. A three-year-old confidently said, 'I love a challenge', representing the ethos among all children in the nursery.
- Partnerships with parents are particularly strong in early years. Parents express great confidence in the early years setting. Should a parent have a concern, staff are easily accessible to provide parents with feedback about their child.
- Pupils make strong progress in all areas of learning. Communication about children's progress between staff in nursery and their colleagues in the school is highly effective. Consequently, children are prepared well to transition from the nursery to the next stage of their education.

School details

Unique reference number	131567
DfE registration number	886/6113
Inspection number	10052089

This inspection was carried out under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

Type of school	Other Independent School
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	2 to 12
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	55
Number of part-time pupils	24
Proprietor	J Denning-Smitherman
Headteacher	J Denning Smitherman
Annual fees	£7,900 to £8,130 (full time, part time is pro rata)
Telephone number	01622 721 731
Website	www.sthelensmontessori.co.uk
Email address	office@sthelensmontessori.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	5–7 July 2016

Information about this school

- St Helens Montessori School follows the Montessori approach. It is a Christian school, although children of all faiths are accepted.
- The school is registered for 130 pupils, although at the time of the inspection there were 55 on roll. There were 29 children in the nursery, of which 24 were part-time pupils.
- The school offers a discounted fee for siblings.
- The school is an approved provider of up to 30 hours free early years education funding.

- There are no children with education, health and care plans.
- The proprietor, who is also the headteacher, provides the governance for the school.

Information about this inspection

- This full standard inspection took place with no notice.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, senior leaders, including those that have responsibility for safeguarding, and other members of staff. The inspector also considered seven responses from staff to the questionnaire.
- The inspector held a telephone conversation with an external Montessori training provider.
- The inspector met with a group of parents and considered 32 responses to the online questionnaire. A further 24 parents made written responses.
- The inspector observed teaching and learning in visits to lessons and an assembly. The headteacher accompanied the inspector during some of the observations.
- A number of documents were scrutinised, including the school's self-evaluation, the school improvement plan, records of pupils' progress, safeguarding documentation, health and safety documentation and minutes from the parents' association meetings.

Inspection team

Sue Child, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Annex. Compliance with regulatory statements.

The school must meet the following independent school standards

Part 3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils.

- 7 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that–
 - 7(a) arrangements are made to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils at the school; and
 - 7(b) such arrangements have regard to any guidance issued by the Secretary of State.
- 11 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that relevant health and safety laws are complied with by the drawing up and effective implementation of a written health and safety policy.
- 12 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures compliance with the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005.
- 13 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that first aid is administered in a timely and competent manner by the drawing up and effective implementation of a written first aid policy.
- 16 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that–
 - 16(a) the welfare of pupils at the school is safeguarded and promoted by the drawing up and effective implementation of a written risk assessment policy; and
 - 16(b) appropriate action is taken to reduce risks that are identified.

Part 4. Suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors

- 18(1) The standard in this paragraph relates to the suitability of persons appointed as members of staff at the school, other than proprietor and supply staff.
- 18(2) The standard in this paragraph is met if –
 - 18(2)(a) no such person is barred from regulated activity relating to children in accordance with section 3(2) of the 2006 Act where that person is or will be engaging in activity which is regulated activity within the meaning of Part 1 of Schedule 4 to that Act;
 - 18(2)(b) no such person carries out the work, or intends to carry out work, at the school in contravention of a prohibition order, an interim prohibition order, or any direction made under section 128 of the 2008 Act or section 142 of the 2002 Act, or any disqualification, prohibition or restriction which takes effect as if contained in either such direction;
 - 18(2)(c) the proprietor carries out appropriate checks to confirm in respect of each such person–
 - 18(2)(c)(i) the person's identity;
 - 18(2)(c)(ii) the person's medical fitness;
 - 18(2)(c)(iii) the person's right to work in the United Kingdom; and

- 18(2)(c)(iv) where appropriate, the person’s qualifications;
 - 18(2)(d) the proprietor ensures that, where relevant to any such person, an enhanced criminal record check is made in respect of that person and an enhanced criminal record certificate is obtained before or as soon as practicable after that person’s appointment;
 - 18(2)(e) in the case of any person for whom, by reason of that person living or having lived outside the United Kingdom, obtaining such a certificate is not sufficient to establish the person’s suitability to work in a school, such further checks are made as the proprietor considers appropriate, having regard to any guidance issued by the Secretary of State.
 - 18(3) The checks referred to in sub-paragraphs (2)(c) and (except where sub-paragraph (4) applies) (2)(e) must be completed before a person’s appointment.
 - 19(3) Except in the case of a person to whom sub-paragraph (4) applies, the certificate referred to in sub-paragraph (2)(a)(i)(bb) must have been obtained not more than 3 months before the date on which the person is due to begin work at the school.
- (21)(1) The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor keeps a register which shows such of the information referred to in sub-paragraphs (3) to (7) as is applicable to the school in question.
 - 21(2) The register referred to in sub-paragraph (1) may be kept in electronic form, provided that the information so recorded is capable of being reproduced in legible form.
 - 21(3) The information referred to in this sub-paragraph is–
 - 21(3)(a) in relation to each member of staff (‘S’) appointed on or after 1st May 2007, whether–
 - 21(3)(a)(i) S’s identity was checked;
 - 21(3)(a)(ii) a check was made to establish whether S is barred from regulated activity relating to children in accordance with section 3(2) of the 2006 Act;
 - 21(3)(a)(iii) a check was made to establish whether S is subject to any direction made under section 128 of the 2008 Act or section 142 of the 2002 Act or any disqualification, prohibition or restriction which takes effect as if contained in such a direction;
 - 21(3)(a)(iv) checks were made to ensure, where appropriate, that S had the relevant qualifications;
 - 21(3)(a)(v) an enhanced criminal record certificate was obtained in respect of S;
 - 21(3)(a)(vi) checks were made pursuant to paragraph 18(2)(d);
 - 21(3)(a)(vii) a check of S’s right to work in the United Kingdom was made; and
 - 21(3)(a)(viii) checks were made pursuant to paragraph 18(2)(e),
 - 21(3)(b) in relation to each member of staff (‘S’), whether a check was made to establish whether S is subject to a prohibition order or an interim prohibition order, including the date on which such check was completed.

- 21(4) The information referred to in this sub-paragraph is, in relation to each member of staff in post on 1st August 2007 who was appointed at any time before 1st May 2007, whether each check referred to in sub-paragraph (3) was made and whether an enhanced criminal record certificate was obtained, together with the date on which any check was completed or certificate obtained.

Part 5. Premises and accommodation at schools

- 24(1) The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that suitable accommodation is provided in order to cater for the medical and therapy needs of pupils, including–
 - 24(1)(a) accommodation for the medical examination and treatment of pupils;
 - 24(1)(b) accommodation for the short term care of sick and injured pupils, which includes a washing facility and is near to a toilet facility.
 - 24(2) The accommodation provided under sub-paragraphs (1)(a) and (b) may be used for other purposes (apart from teaching) provided it is always readily available to be used for the purposes set out in sub-paragraphs (1)(a) and (b).
- 28(1) The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that–
 - 28(1)(d) the temperature of hot water at the point of use does not pose a scalding risk to users.

Part 6. Provision of information

- 32(1) The standard about the provision of information by the school is met if the proprietor ensures that–
 - 32(1)(c) particulars of the arrangements for meeting the standard contained in paragraph 7 are published on the school's internet website or, where no such website exists, are provided to parents on request.

Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

- 34(1) The standard about the quality of leadership and management is met if the proprietor ensures that persons with leadership and management responsibilities at the school–
 - 34(1)(a) demonstrate good skills and knowledge appropriate to their role so that the independent school standards are met consistently;
 - 34(1)(b) fulfil their responsibilities effectively so that the independent school standards are met consistently; and
 - 34(1)(c) actively promote the well-being of pupils.

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