

Grantham Farm Montessori School

Independent School

Inspection report

DCSF Registration Number	850/6079
Unique Reference Number	133964
Inspection number	316934
Inspection dates	09-10 October 2007
Reporting inspector	John Coleman HMI

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 162A of the Education Act 2002 (as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005).

Inspection of funded nursery education was carried out under Schedule 26 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998.

Inspection of day care was carried out under the Children Act 1989: Part XA (as introduced by the Care Standards Act 2000) and, where funded nursery education is provided, under Schedule 26 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998.

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Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out by Ofsted under section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005, in order 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

Grantham Farm Montessori School incorporating The Children's House, opened in 1985 when it was established by the current proprietor. It is situated on the Hampshire Berkshire border. The school is registered to provide full time education for up to 40 children aged 2½ to 7 years. Currently there are 22 children in the school. Sixteen children are aged three to four years and receive government grant funding towards their placement. The school is also registered to provide day care for up to 40 children. Situated in a rural area, the school building is a specially converted barn and provides bright spacious accommodation comprising classrooms, study areas and creative spaces for craft and art work. Outdoors the school offers a large expanse of green space and a small hard surfaced area.

In keeping with other Montessori schools, Grantham Farm follows a Montessori approach to early education which focuses upon children being given the freedom and independence to learn at their own pace. Children are encouraged to 'choose, try and do' for themselves. Specially developed materials are used in a prepared environment under the guidance of a Directress (teacher). The Senior Directress (headteacher) at Grantham Farm is the proprietor. The curriculum incorporates the curriculum guidance for the Foundation Stage and the National Curriculum.

The school aims to, *'provide high quality Montessori Education in a happy stimulating environment, preparing every child for a successful life in the 21st Century.'*

Evaluation of the school

Grantham Farm Montessori School provides an outstanding quality of education and care for its children. The curriculum is outstanding in its effectiveness, structuring the requirements of the Foundation Stage areas of learning and early National Curriculum, with the Montessori approach to experiential and sensorial learning. Teaching is outstanding. Children are very happy coming to school; they enjoy the welcoming and vibrant environment and develop outstanding relationships with each other and with their teachers. Parents are overwhelmingly supportive in their praise of the school. The school meets all the independent school regulations.

Quality of education

The curriculum is outstanding across the school. Curriculum provision for the younger children is outstanding because the Montessori approach to learning is seamlessly woven into the curriculum guidance for the Foundation Stage. Teachers' planning shows all the areas of learning covered in an integrated and experientially based way. Every opportunity is taken to promote children's development in the basic skills of reading and writing through very well prepared projects of study, which stem from the real life experiences of the children. For example, a project on 'Transport' includes opportunities for the children to learn about road safety and road signs, they 'role play' the correct way to cross the road, discuss the dangers and write about what they have learnt. Problem solving is at the heart of many tactile activities for children such as using cylinder blocks and number rods to develop number skills and an awareness of shape and space. A strong focus is made to develop children's phonic skills by carefully directing children's learning. For example, sandpaper letters are used to give each child a concrete feel for each letter as they learn the shape and phonetic sound. The sand tray helps children practice letter directions and a large moveable alphabet board helps children build phonic words and learn to read them. The outdoor environment is used very well to extend learning and to provide enjoyment. Children develop their personal and social skills extremely well because of the daily routines and expert guidance. They learn to shake hands as they greet staff or say goodbye, learn to wash hands and dry them, to put their mats away at the end of the activity, wear aprons and hang them up, pour drinks for friends, learn to tie shoelaces and clear the floor to keep everything tidy. Children develop fine motor skills well as they learn to pour, thread, sort pegs and spoon things in the many creative activities in which they regularly engage. Provision for developing children's creative development is outstanding through the wide range of experiences including painting, cutting, chalking and stringing. Children learn to dance and play games together; they dress up and perform in front of adults such as in the Nativity play.

The curriculum for the older children is outstanding and builds very effectively on the prior experiences of children. Activities develop children's curiosity, imagination and creativity by providing interesting and challenging tasks. The indoor environment is particularly well organised to create learning spaces which utilise carpets on the floor, tables and work surfaces, sensorial materials and problem solving equipment. There is a well resourced book corner where children read and share books with friends. Reading is developed by one to one teaching using 'phonetic' and 'look and say' approaches. A computer provides software programmes which extend children's educational experiences and enjoyment. The subjects of the National Curriculum are covered in projects which include excellent provision for children's personal and social education. Teachers' planning is highly successful in enabling children to make connections between their experiences and make sense of their learning. The curriculum is further enhanced by the provision of French. A number of visits are made to places of interest and this adds to children's enjoyment of the subjects they

are studying. For example, local trips to the farm and a visit to 'Child Beale Trust' to see endangered animals.

The quality of teaching and assessment is outstanding throughout the school. When the youngest children start school there are excellent arrangements to assess what they know and can do, this is shared appropriately with parents. Whilst the school is non-selective, children enter with a range of skills which overall are above those expected in the majority of schools. From then onwards teachers build very effectively on this baseline, delivering tasks and activities which are well matched to the children's needs. Teachers know their children very well and have an expert knowledge of how young people learn. Teachers are skilled in applying a suitable balance between intervention and guidance in children's learning. Their skills of questioning are excellent and this develops children's skills in speaking and listening extremely well. In a lesson seen during the inspection some older children brought in photographs of themselves as babies, they looked for similarities and differences as a basis for discussion. One girl showed her developing observation skills by remarking, 'that baby must be you because you have the same smile'. Learning from their experiences makes lessons fun and interesting for children. Teachers praise and encourage children to do well. High expectations are set by teachers for all children and the staff provide excellent role models in their manner, work commitment and the caring way they treat everyone. Children respond by being polite and co-operative, and behaviour is exemplary. Assessment is on going and forms a part of the daily routine; teachers listen, note and record the children's progress in a systematic way. There are excellent monitoring arrangements which ensure that children's 'individual progress is recorded, including the Foundation Stage Profile. Assessments of children's achievements in developing skills in the Montessori curriculum are synchronised with their progress in the Foundation Stage and National curriculum. This information is used very well to target children's learning and to report to parents on progress.

Children make outstanding progress in their personal and academic development. In lessons seen during the inspection, teaching builds upon children's prior knowledge and understanding very well providing challenging activities which result in outstanding progress. Work samples in children's books and on general display show very high standards. Assessment records demonstrate that many children attain the Early Learning Goals of the Foundation Stage curriculum and indeed exceed these. By the age of 5 for example, children write neatly and legibly, by 6 they have a cursive script and free writing in sentences contains full stops, capital letters and a range of adjectives. Standards in reading are very high. Mathematical development is similarly well above that found in most schools and children use numbers confidently and with interest. Children are articulate and confident. This is no accident; teachers build children's self esteem very well through regular praise and a high level of interest and attention to their needs. The small numbers of children and good staffing ratios are used very effectively to ensure that children learn according to their ability and aptitude.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

Provision for the children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Children enjoy school greatly and they develop a strong empathy for the needs of their friends as they learn to share, take turns and become responsible to carry out jobs. The school helps children develop a desire to learn and a willingness to work hard. As one parent puts it in the questionnaires returned to inspectors, 'The teachers here give my child the self belief that she can achieve. Therefore she wants to do her best for herself, not because she is made to work hard'.

Children understand the need for school rules and boundaries and develop an understanding of the difference between right and wrong through the excellent guidance of teachers. Behaviour is outstanding as a result. Their social development, which is outstanding, is a continuous process developing in children patience, tolerance, understanding and appreciation of the needs of others. Spiritual development too is outstanding, as seen during the inspection when in 'circle time' the children took part in a range of musical and physical activities. After holding coloured scarves and making 'smooth' movements to smooth music they exerted themselves vigorously to create 'jerky' movements to music. They then sang a whispering melody which became increasingly quiet until they reached a stillness and tranquillity which became sustained silence. This was a moving moment as children reflected and showed reverence for their world and each other.

Cultural development is outstanding. Children are taught about the cultures and traditions of Britain and other parts of the world through the excellent curriculum. They make a very good contribution to the local community through activities such as the harvest gifts which are donated through the local church.

Welfare, health and safety of the pupils

The school makes outstanding provision for children's welfare, health and safety. All relevant policies are in place and are up to date. The supervision of children is vigilant and risk assessments are completed for children's activities and with regard to the premises. Fire safety is given a high profile, there are regular drills, checks on equipment, staff training and at the most recent visit by the fire officer there are no issues identified. Children are taught about safety as part of the curriculum. Children are encouraged to be healthy through a good range of physical activity. Packed lunches are enjoyed by children under the watchful eye of staff, and healthy habits are developed with the support of parents. Children have lots of fruit and drinking water is always available. Attendance by children is very high and the admission procedures are well kept.

Excellent routines are in place to safeguard the younger children as they arrive and when they leave the school. There are very good record keeping systems for all

children which monitor their health, welfare and education. The headteacher knows all the children very well and understands their individual needs. Child protection procedures are in place with suitable training for staff. The school is a smoke free environment. There is a suitable policy for first aid and staff have received appropriate training. Children are taught well about matters of hygiene.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

The proprietor has suitable recruitment procedures in place to ensure that staff and volunteers have undergone the necessary checks before commencing work at the school. A central register is kept and the required checks with the Criminal Records Bureau are undertaken.

School's premises and accommodation

The school is well maintained, spacious and extremely well organised. Access is good although the small top floor study area does not have access for the disabled. Classrooms are spacious for the small number of children and very well resourced. The outdoor space includes an extensive field with a sand pit, logs, trees and equipment for large and small games. The amount of hard surfaced space is small and the range of outdoor wheeled toys is limited. There is a swimming pool outdoors which is used by the school. Facilities available in the adjacent house include a washroom for adult use and a room to be used if a child is sick. Washroom facilities in school meet regulations, but for the older children they lack sufficient privacy.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

The school has a very good website which contains lots of useful information for parents and others enquiring about the school. This includes details of the school curriculum and the Montessori approach to education. Other information is initially given directly by the headteacher, including the practice of parents accessing each of the school's policies and procedures. Regular letters to parents keep them informed about the life of the school. Reports about children's attainment and progress are received by parents twice each year. Parent questionnaires signified high levels of satisfaction with the information they receive.

Procedures for handling complaints

The school's policy and procedures meet the requirements.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school meets all of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as amended January 2005

What the school could do to improve further

While not required by the regulations, the school might wish to consider the following points for development:

- expand the range of outdoor play equipment
- improve the washrooms to provide better privacy for the older children.

Inspection of day care registered by Ofsted

Effectiveness of the registered day care

The quality of care is outstanding. The premises are secure and welcoming and excellent use is made of the space. The learning environment is organised exceptionally well, providing a vibrant and stimulating arena, where the children are effectively challenged. The setting uses traditional Montessori resources, which are easily accessible to children on low-level shelves increasing their independence. Children are able to self-select activities and resources, developing their freedom of choice and decision-making skills. Children actively take responsibility for their own environment. Staff deployment is excellent and the daily routines run smoothly, ensuring the children are fully supervised, occupied and engaged. Children's safety is promoted; staff are vigilant and children learn about their own safety through daily routines. Staff are fully aware of the child protection procedures, safeguarding the children.

Children benefit from a nutritious diet because staff have a very good understanding of healthy eating. They provide an extensive range of fresh fruit and children talk about the type of food that is good for them. They reap the benefits of fresh air during regular outings. Children's self-care skills are developing extremely well during sessions. All the required policies and procedures are in place and effectively contribute to the children's well-being. Children behave exceptionally well because clear boundaries are implemented consistently by the staff. Children develop an excellent sense of right and wrong and staff are extremely positive role models, leading by example in everything they do. Children benefit greatly from exceptionally strong links and open communication between their parents and staff. The needs of all children are met. The outcomes for being healthy, staying safe, enjoying and achieving, positive contribution and organisation are outstanding.

Excellent progress has been made since the last inspection and all recommendations have been addressed. 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 they can see on request. The complaints record may contain complaints other than those made to Ofsted.

Inspection of funded nursery education

Effectiveness of the funded nursery education

The quality of teaching and learning are outstanding. All staff have a very clear understanding of the Foundation Stage and link the Montessori approach seamlessly, helping children to make rapid progress towards and sometimes past the early learning goals. Staff are extremely well informed about the children's starting points. The exceptionally well-balanced planning and the children's assessments are meticulous and ensure every child's learning path is unique and tailored to meet their individual needs.

Children are keen and motivated to learn, showing extremely high levels of concentration and independence in all six areas of learning. Staff engage the children in purposeful conversations, asking open-ended questions to expand their thoughts and ideas. Activities are planned effectively to ensure children are able to observe whole processes, enabling them to make secure connections. For example, they plant and watch sunflower seeds grow, ending the topic with collecting the seeds from the flower heads to plant the following year.

Children with learning difficulties and those with English as an additional language are supported effectively because the setting provides a fully inclusive curriculum. Partnership with parents is outstanding. Parents are exceptionally well informed about their children's progress, daily and through parents' evenings, detailed written reports and access to their children's records. Children develop a clear understanding of the world around them through planned topics and themes. They are polite and show consideration for others, respecting other children's work and sharing the resources with ease. Children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is fostered.

The leadership and management of the setting are outstanding. The owner plays an extremely active role in the setting. She is extremely knowledgeable, supporting and developing the well-established staff team. The owner has high expectations for her staff team and they work exceptionally well together, striving to further improve the outstanding quality of care and education. The daily routines, activities, curriculum and staff contributions are continually monitored and reviewed to ensure the high standards are maintained.

School details

Name of school	Grantham Farm Montessori School		
DCSF number	850/6079		
Unique reference number	133964		
Unique reference number (day care)	EY110151		
Unique reference number (funded nursery education)	EY110151		
Type of school	Montessori day school		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	1985		
Age range of pupils	2-7		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 0	Girls: 1	Total: 1
Number on roll (part-time pupils)	Boys: 11	Girls: 10	Total:21
Number of children receiving funded nursery education	Boys:8	Girls: 8	Total:16
Annual fees (day pupils aged 5-7)	£5700		
Address of school	Baughurst Tadley Hampshire RG26 5JS		
Telephone number	01189815821		
Fax number	01189820989		
Email address	school@granthamfarm.org		
Headteacher	Mrs S de Boinville		
Proprietor	Mrs S de Boinville		
Reporting inspector	John Coleman HMI		
Childcare inspector	Lisa Cupples CCI		
Dates of inspection	09-10 October 2007		