

Summarised inspection findings

The Montessori School, Edinburgh

Independent School

Post-registration inspection

12 March 2024

Key contextual information

The Montessori School, Edinburgh opened in March 2023. It is located within the halls of Murrayfield Parish Church. The school has sole use of the upper floor of the church hall accommodation each weekday during term time. The school has a capacity for 15 children aged six to 12 years of age. The current roll is eight. The school operates Monday to Thursday full day and a half day on Friday.

The school is led by a Principal. She also leads The Montessori Nursery School which is located close to the school. Children are beginning to make the transition from the nursery through to the school. Governance of the school sits with the Advisory Group.

1.4 Leadership and management of staff

good

This indicator highlights the importance of sound governance and fair and proper recruitment and selection of staff. It focuses on accountability, responsibility and shared values as important features of building and sustaining a highly-professional staff team. Effective empowerment of staff and partners with due regard to wellbeing and positive relationships is a key feature of a successful professional team. The themes are:

- Governance framework
- Building and sustaining a professional staff team
- Staff wellbeing and pastoral support

- The Principal, teaching staff and Advisory Group have a clear vision for the school. This is based soundly on the values and principles of a Montessori Elementary education. Since the school opened in March 2023, the Principal, staff and advisors have carried out their roles effectively to establish the school and begin its growth. They are very proud of the progress they have made in providing an authentic Montessori Elementary education thus far.
- The Advisory Group provide expert advice and guidance to the Principal and staff. They have made a positive start to establishing governance of the school. They have a well-informed insight into leadership, management and the Montessori approach. The Advisory Group have impacted positively on establishing appropriate premises and policies. They have begun to consider how they will work together to ensure oversight of the school. They recognise the need to establish firmly their role within ongoing self-evaluation and improvement methodology. The Principal has begun to consider how parents can become involved through forming a parents group. She has plans in place to include them in more formalised self-evaluation processes.
- Parents are very satisfied with the way in which the school has been set up and how it continues to evolve. They feel included and informed about the work of the school. Parents feel the Principal and teaching staff are very receptive to their comments and feedback.
- The Principal has successfully recruited General Teaching Council of Scotland registered teachers who have an expertise in Montessori Elementary education. They bring a wealth of experience including teaching in Montessori schools elsewhere. Teaching staff work effectively as a team and provide children with high quality experiences. Teachers liaise with the Principal and meet regularly to discuss the impact of their work on the progress of individual children. They undergo regular professional review and their continuous professional learning is reflective of the needs of the school as it becomes established. Teachers are keen to develop

self-evaluation approaches which will help them build upon their successes in establishing the school.

- The Principal and staff have collaborated to ensure there are clear policies and procedures in place to support the safe running of the school. They are attentive to statutory duties and health and safety. The Principal has sought to establish continuity and progression for children and families who move through from the nursery school. Staff design tailored transition arrangements. Children who are new to Montessori education receive well-planned induction experiences to support them and their families as they become familiar with the Montessori approach.
- The Principal ensures staff have the resources and policy guidance in place to help them to work effectively. There are clear lines of accountability which enable staff to carry out their roles with confidence and enthusiasm. The Principal is readily available to support and guide staff with any concerns in their day-to-day work. She provides pastoral care for staff, recognises their hard work and willingness to lead change. Staff have clear systems in place to receive support and guidance outwith the school should they request it. The Principal empowers staff to establish the Montessori Elementary approach with individual children at a pace that is appropriate to meet their needs.

1.5 Management of resources to promote equity

Management of resources and environment for learning

- The Principal liaises regularly with the church landlord to negotiate the use of spaces for learning within the church buildings. The school accommodation is safe and secure, with ample space for learning and teaching in different contexts. The classroom is bright and airy, with plenty of room for children to learn in pairs and small groups. Staff and children have access to a large hall and stage on the ground floor of the building. This is an ideal space for teaching physical education (PE) and drama, and for children to play in bad weather. The school has access to a commercial kitchen within the building. Children have practiced food preparation skills in the school to make breakfast for their families and to bake for school events. School staff pay close attention to risk-assessing their use of the building and grounds to keep children safe.
- The fixtures and fittings are of a high quality. The furniture is an appropriate size for children and there are lockable cupboards for storage. There is good access to digital technology within the main teaching area, with a wall-mounted plasma screen and wi-fi access. Due to the shared nature of the accommodation, school staff must tidy away all resources at the end of each day. Children are well used to this routine and help staff to ensure spaces are kept tidy.
- There is a small outdoor paved space and a grassy area with a few resources for children to play under supervision. School staff make very good use of the local area to extend children's learning experiences. They use the adjacent park and nearby woodlands for planned outdoor learning each week.
- Over the past year, school staff have continued to extend their bank of teaching materials including Montessori resources. They have also purchased musical instruments and PE equipment. Staff make very good use of local libraries to ensure children have access to a wide range of fiction and non-fiction texts. They continue to increase resources as required.

This indicator highlights the importance of placing the needs of learners at the centre of curriculum design and development. The structure and delivery of the curriculum should take good account of local and national circumstances. The curriculum is the totality of learning experiences across the four contexts as delivered by the school and its partners. An effective curriculum results in strong outcomes for all learners. The themes are:

- Rationale and design
- Development of the curriculum
- Learning pathways
- Skills for learning, life and work

- The planned school week is of an appropriate length and the school receives children for 178 days of the year at present. The school follows an 'asymmetric week' in line with local City of Edinburgh Council and Lothian schools.
- The curriculum rationale is based firmly on Dr Maria Montessori's educational principles. The curriculum is broad and balanced, covering eight main subject areas. Staff have worked hard to link the curriculum to the experiences and outcomes of Curriculum for Excellence. They have a clear aim to provide children with activities that are active, enjoyable and challenging. They provide real-life contexts for children to apply and extend their knowledge and skills, and which also develop critical thinking skills, resilience and independence.
- Montessori teaching methodology encourages children's independence, but also collaboration in learning. Children of different ages are taught in the same classroom, so that older children can model learning for younger ones. At The Montessori School, Edinburgh children take the lead on their learning activities from a young age. As they progress through the school, they have increased opportunity to find their own solutions to real-life problems and to learn from mistakes. This encourages children to develop resilience as learners, and to demonstrate flexible thinking. There are no group tests or grades and this avoids competition between children. Instead, teachers check on the progress of each child individually using a variety of assessment techniques. Each daily 'work cycle' is around three hours long, to allow the children to immerse themselves in their learning activities. The learning materials are designed for children to handle and explore with all their senses.
- The curriculum is based on the Montessori 'Great Lessons'. Through these, children experience rich individualised learning about science, history, geography, culture, mathematics and language. Some aspects of the curriculum are taught by part-time specialist teachers, such as Spanish, art and drama. PE is taught weekly. The programme for PE is supplemented at various points in the year by specialists such as Capoeira and dance teachers.
- In keeping with Montessori principles, sustainability and environmental education are strong features of the curriculum. Children benefit from weekly opportunities for outdoor learning during 'Nature School' sessions. Staff have plans in place to develop further Forest Schools methodology as a key learning and teaching approach across the curriculum.
- Children are supported very well to make a smooth transition into the school. Staff offer a programme of visits, invitations and family learning opportunities across the year. The very strong links with the school's 'sister' nursery setting ensures that staff have a very good understanding of each child who moves on to the school. Records of learning are shared at points of transition. Staff use these to build on children's prior learning and stage of development when they begin school.

- Staff celebrate the international context of the school. They appreciate the diversity, culture and different first languages that children, families and staff bring to the school. This enhances children's learning experiences.

2.3 Learning, teaching and assessment

very good

This indicator focuses on ensuring high-quality learning experiences for all children and young people. It highlights the importance of highly-skilled staff who work with children, young people and others to ensure learning is motivating and meaningful. Effective use of assessment by staff and learners ensures children and young people maximise their successes and achievements. The themes are:

- learning and engagement
- quality of teaching
- effective use of assessment
- planning, tracking and monitoring

- Children are motivated and actively engaged in their learning. They respond very well to the Montessori approach to individualised learning. They take responsibility for initiating, organising and leading their own learning enthusiastically. Following Montessori educational principles, children are given time and space to move and act freely, following their own learning independently for an extended period each day. Almost all children, during these daily 'work cycle' periods, sustain their interest and concentration to a high level. Across the week, they self-select tasks from a weekly learning plan that they agree with their teachers. This includes playing games using Montessori resources that reinforce their literacy and numeracy skills, as well as learning about the world around them. Throughout the week, children have new experiences and knowledge 'presented' to them individually or in small groups by teachers. Almost all children listen and respond very well during these direct teaching sessions, building on the answers of their peers.
- Children show a high level of respect for each other and their environment, for example, in the way in which resources are left tidily for others. They are treated equally and with fairness by all staff. Children say that their learning is interesting and enjoyable. They work very well together in small groups and as individuals. Children are developing skills for learning, life and work through demonstrating leadership of their own learning. For example, older children time how long it takes them to complete certain tasks to their high standards. They take responsibility for ensuring their own learning is at a suitably brisk pace.
- Learning in out-of-class contexts is a key part of children's learning experiences. Older children take full ownership of all aspects of planning their 'Going Out' sessions. They use public transport timetables and local information to organise and budget for bespoke outings to places of interest to them. During these outings, children are given real-life opportunities to practice and apply literacy, numeracy and problem-solving skills. In these learning episodes, accompanying adults provide a neutral, chaperone role. This allows children to make all decisions and to lead discussions, including travelling arrangements. If children make errors or mistakes, for example missing the correct bus stop, adults do not solve the problem for them. This immersive style of experiential learning allows children to apply their significant skills and knowledge in real life. Children are learning about the wider world in a safe yet practical way.
- In class, teachers provide a very well-judged balance of support and challenge to ensure that all children are engaged and make progress in their learning. Teachers support children sensitively to use their creativity and problem-solving skills as a routine part of their learning experiences. During these times, teachers take on the role of guides, supporting children to make choices and decisions about what and how they want to learn. They encourage children to complete tasks and activities with as little adult direction as possible.

- Teachers check in with each child throughout their daily 'work cycle'. They give children individual ongoing feedback on their learning, pinpointing strengths and next steps. As a result, children are very well motivated to pursue with their tasks and activities, often going well beyond the scope of their own original plans.
- Children have daily opportunities to reinforce and apply their literacy and numeracy skills across their learning. They write in a range of genres and for a variety of worthwhile and relevant purposes, often sparked by their own interests. For example, older children often feel self-motivated to write at length, creating their own comic books, biographies and stories with chapters.
- During lessons where children learn as a whole group, such as PE, drama and Nature School, children co-operate very closely with each other. They listen carefully to teachers for information. Teachers' explanations are clear. They use questioning techniques very effectively to check on children's understanding and to stretch and extend their thinking.
- The school has developed robust systems for planning, assessing and tracking children's progress. Teachers record their observations of each child's learning throughout the school day on a digital platform, including taking photographs of key pieces of work. Teachers write about the materials that children are working with, including whether the recorded learning has been recently introduced, practised or mastered. Parents can see excerpts of their children's learning across the curriculum at any time using the digital platform. They can view explanations of the Montessori resources that children are using, and how these help them in their learning. In addition, parents receive two very detailed written reports on their children's progress across the year. They have opportunities for parent-teacher conferences, to discuss how their child is doing at school.
- Teachers have spent significant time matching the school's curriculum and resources to Curriculum for Excellence experiences and outcomes. This allows teachers to moderate children's progress against national standards outlined in the National Benchmarks, as well as within the Montessori Elementary curriculum.

2.1 Safeguarding

- The school submitted self-evaluation information related to child protection and safeguarding. Inspectors discussed this information with relevant staff. In addition, inspectors examined a sample of safeguarding documentation. Areas for development have been agreed with the school.

3.1 Ensuring wellbeing, equality and inclusion

good

This indicator focuses on the impact of the school's approach to wellbeing which underpins children and young people's ability to achieve success. It highlights the need for policies and practices to be well grounded in current legislation and a shared understanding of the value of every individual. A clear focus on ensuring wellbeing entitlements and protected characteristics supports all learners to maximise their successes and achievements. The themes are:

- wellbeing
- fulfilment of statutory duties
- inclusion and equality

- The Principal and staff, in the short time the school has been open, have established a strong sense of community and identity which aligns with the Montessori approach. Children demonstrate that they feel valued and respected. They have formed close relationships in school and work well alongside each other in pairs and groups. Staff endeavour to provide a consistent education with kindness and compassion for each child and their family.
- Staff show a deep understanding of the worth of every child and their right to learn. Children engage very well with their individualised plans and benefit from the increased confidence that embracing learning at their own pace brings. They demonstrate positive growth mindsets through their learning and enjoy the freedom to learn in the defined areas within the classroom space to suit their interests. Children are confident in talking about their own strengths and areas for improvement. They are also good at recognising the capabilities and strengths of others.
- Children talk about wellbeing within their own context. They are less familiar with the national wellbeing indicators and staff recognise this is a next step in their work with children. Staff plan, very carefully, for children to be able to achieve success in all areas of their learning. Children are responsible for respecting and including their peers. They speak to staff when they need support or reassurance to feel included and understood. Children are making good progress in learning to plan and risk assess their own outings.
- Children take a democratic approach to resolving any issues they perceive are impacting on their learning at school. They have weekly meetings to discuss what is important to them. Children are guided, where appropriate, by staff, to plan their own resolutions and keep to them. As a result, children learn in a calm environment.
- Children take part in a wide range of experiences to support their mental and physical wellbeing. They learn in natural woodland and take regular walks in local parks. Children know how to use mindfulness techniques outdoors to support a calm mind and aid concentration. They use these techniques well indoors to support their learning. Children engage in regular physical activity as part of a carefully planned programme and work hard to improve their skill and stamina. Teachers continue to develop these aspects of the curriculum using children's ideas.
- The school has appropriate policies in place to keep children and staff safe and that reflect statutory duties. They recognise they need to continue to refine their approach to record keeping. All staff take part in regular training for child protection. They understand their statutory duties in meeting the learning needs for children who may have additional support needs. Staff maintain and review regularly personal plans for all children. This is helping them

ensure wellbeing for children. They provide twice yearly opportunities for parents and staff to talk together about children's health and wellbeing.

- Children and staff are welcoming. Their school ethos is reflective of the wide range of nationalities and cultures represented in the families who attend the school. Children are inclusive and respectful in their attitudes. They learn about other faiths, families and cultures which are different to their own. As a result, they show an understanding of the rights of others. Teachers are supporting children well to deepen this learning as the school becomes even more established.

Explanation of terms of quantity

The following standard Education Scotland terms of quantity are used in this report:

All	100%
Almost all	91%-99%
Most	75%-90%
Majority	50%-74%
Minority/less than half	15%-49%
A few	less than 15%

Other quantitative terms used in this report are to be understood as in common English usage.