



Arolygiaeth Ei Fawrhydi dros Addysg a Hyfforddiant yng Nghymru
His Majesty's Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales

A report on

Cardiff Montessori School

73 Ty Glas Avenue

Llanishen

Cardiff

Date of inspection: March 2023

by

Estyn, His Majesty's Inspectorate for Education

and Training in Wales

About Cardiff Montessori School

Name of provider	Cardiff Montessori School
Proprietor	Dr Esma Izzidien
Local authority	Cardiff Council
Language of the provider	English
Type of school	Independent primary
Residential provision?	No
Number of pupils on roll	79
Pupils of statutory school age	55
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	
Start date of inspection	20/03/2023
<p>Throughout this report the school's nomenclature for each phase of education will be used:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Toddlers refers to pupils aged two to three.• The Children's House refers to pupils aged three to six.• Lower Elementary refers to pupils aged six to nine.• Upper Elementary refers to pupils aged nine to twelve.	

Data reported is sourced from the latest available Pupil Level Annual School Census. These figures may be slightly different to those observed during the inspection. Further information is available from the Welsh Government My Local School website: mylocalschool.gov.wales

- a. The term 'additional learning needs' is being used to describe those pupils on the SEN/ALN register of the school.

Overview

Cardiff Montessori School was founded by the proprietor and current headteacher in 2016. The school implements the Montessori approach and curriculum faithfully. It empowers pupils to 'be Montessori' and embodies the values of kindness, honesty, respect and responsibility highly successfully. There is a determined focus on the promotion of well-being through these values, and consequently the school has the affection and loyalty of pupils, parents and staff.

Nearly all learning experiences throughout the school are authentic. Throughout the school there is a clear and progressive focus on sensorial, physical and cognitive development. Pupils are taught independent living skills from an early age, and kindness, respect, grace and courtesy are actively taught to pupils of all ages.

Pupils at the school are inquisitive, confident, responsible and highly independent. They feel happy and safe due to the nurturing and respectful relationships that exist between all members of the school. Pupils confidently resolve many of their own problems and excitedly take responsibility for their own learning. As a result, most pupils make strong progress from their starting points.

Leaders are knowledgeable, compassionate and caring and their management of the school is highly effective. There is a strong sense of staff unity and everyone at the school works together in pupils' best interests. All staff actively contribute to the school's improvement. However, these arrangements are not focused or structured sharply enough.

The Montessori teaching approach is firmly embedded across the school. All staff know their pupils extremely well and respond to their well-being needs effectively. Teachers work as 'guides' to facilitate pupils' learning, which is sequenced so that their knowledge and skills build as they move through the school. However, pupils do not always receive feedback on their work in a timely manner to help sustain improvements.

Cardiff Montessori School meets all the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003.

Compliance with the regulations for registration

Independent school inspections are governed by the Education Act 2002 and related regulations: the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003. These regulations require an independent school to meet an appropriate standard in the following areas:

The quality of education provided by the school

The school meets the regulatory requirements for this standard.

The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

The school meets the regulatory requirements for this standard.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

The school meets the regulatory requirements for this standard.

The suitability of proprietors and staff

The school meets the regulatory requirements for this standard.

Premises of and boarding accommodation at schools

The school meets the regulatory requirements for this standard.

The provision of information

The school meets the regulatory requirements for this standard.

The manner in which complaints are to be handled

The school meets the regulatory requirements for this standard.

Recommendations

- R1 Formalise and sharpen quality assurance arrangements to focus on key areas for improvement
- R2 Ensure that teacher feedback is more immediate and helps pupils sustain improvements in learning successfully
- R3 Improve the quality of writing across the school

What happens next

Estyn advises the proprietor to amend its current development plan to show what actions the school intends to take in response to the recommendations. It is also advisable to circulate this plan, or a summary of it, to all parents/carers at the school.

Main findings

Learning

Whilst following the Montessori Curriculum, nearly all younger pupils make strong progress with their sensory and physical development, including their fine and gross motor skills. Pupils in The Children's House also make strong progress with their early literacy and numeracy skills. As pupils progress through the Elementary phases, many pupils make strong progress in wider linguistic and mathematical skills and their application in the broader curriculum.

Across the school, pupils' oracy skills are highly developed. Nearly all pupils listen carefully and pay close attention to what their peers and adults have to say. They ask thoughtful questions that develop ideas and make effective contributions that take other pupils' views into account. Pupils express themselves clearly from an early age. They convey clear understanding and talk enthusiastically about their work. By Upper Elementary, most pupils are articulate and mature speakers. They moderate their tone, expression and language depending on the audience. They develop conversations well.

Most pupils' writing develops suitably during their time at the school. Many of the youngest pupils develop exceptional fine motor skills through well thought-out activities. Elementary pupils of all abilities write frequently and with increasing independence. As they get older, pupils' handwriting improves in clarity and pupils confidently attempt to spell words phonetically. Many older pupils develop appropriate sentence structures, including capitalisation and the use of basic punctuation. However, these pupils do not consistently use these accurately when writing for different purposes. Older pupils craft different forms of writing, for example stories, letters or persuasive pieces, and in the best examples this writing is fluid, extended and expressive. Pupils apply their writing skills across the curriculum appropriately. For example, pupils write about rock formations or the digestive system as part of the Cosmic Curriculum. By Upper Elementary, many pupils use a range of ambitious vocabulary designed to engage the reader.

Younger pupils develop a good phonic knowledge and use this successfully to help them to read. The eldest children in the Children's House recognise and write their own names successfully, understand the sounds that letters make and can read high frequency words. Many show an enjoyment of books and delight in emulating reading through reciting familiar songs, for example 'wind the bobbin up'. Nearly all pupils develop effective reading skills and, by the end of Lower Elementary, they read a range of suitable texts accurately and fluently. Many older pupils develop into confident readers with a good understanding of a wide range of genres. They recognise the meaning of increasingly challenging vocabulary, think maturely about what they have read and make thoughtful inferences and deductions. For example, pupils in Upper Elementary discuss likely plot developments and endings of the books they are currently reading.

Across the school, most pupils develop a strong understanding of place value and a wide range of numerical skills including the four mathematical operations. The youngest learners enjoy describing numbers using physical resources such as

stacking number cards or working with number rods. Nearly all pupils in the Children's House can describe four-digit numbers accurately. In Lower Elementary, most pupils consolidate their skills effectively developing their understanding of arithmetic, fractions, analogue time and aspects of geometry. Older pupils begin to bridge the gap between physical and abstract concepts successfully using binomial squares and cubes. Across the school, pupils are developing the ability to solve problems well. They employ problem-solving strategies effectively to identify key words, extract information and correctly choose the appropriate mathematical operation.

Pupils' ability to think for themselves is highly developed. For example, pupils in the Children's House choose suitable materials to tidy up spilt paint when they are unable to find tissues in the usual place. Upper Elementary pupils can make realistic hypotheses about the effects that spinning a bucket will have upon the liquid inside. Older pupils organise and undertake their own educational visits and recently they arranged to visit a 'bubble tea' shop in Cardiff. During this trip, pupils overcame challenges successfully by thinking clearly, remaining calm, and working together effectively.

As they progress through the school, nearly all pupils develop their physical skills highly effectively. For example, in the Toddler's class, pupils tie their shoes successfully and use scissors to cut materials precisely. Pupils in the Children's House make intricate bracelets using tiny beads and handle delicate objects carefully. Older pupils build on these skills appropriately through varied opportunities to explore the outdoors, both as part of the curriculum and during their playtime.

Throughout the school, pupils develop outstanding independent living skills. As part of their well-established routines, pupils of all ages clean and tidy up after themselves, manage their own snacks and meals, and plan their own working day effectively. Along with this freedom and responsibility, pupils develop excellent creative skills. Pupils control how work is presented, whether it is written or presented in another medium, and frequently choose to use a wide range of resources to produce and display their work. For example, younger pupils paint successfully in the style of Mark Rothko and older pupils use string to imaginatively create skeletal models when learning about the human body.

Well-being and attitudes to learning

Pupils are very proud of their school and are enthusiastic about all aspects of their day. They speak highly about the culture of freedom within the school, to choose their own daily learning journey, and feel that they are trusted and respected by staff. Nearly all pupils feel safe in school and can identify adults that they would talk to if they had any concerns. They are comfortable and secure in their environment.

Many pupils feel that they are treated fairly, as unique individuals, and that they are encouraged to respect others. Mixed age classes create meaningful opportunities for pupils to support and collaborate with each other. Pupils are respectful of each other's space, work and resources. For example, pupils in the Children's House consider cleaning paintbrushes so that they are ready for the next user and help each other with their aprons. This sense of community contributes to pupils' well-being very strongly.

Most pupils feel that they do not experience bullying. Should moments of disagreement occur, pupils feel that issues are dealt with promptly and effectively, often without the need for adult intervention. This is testimony to pupils' highly developed skills in empathy and negotiation.

Nearly all pupils feel that they are listened to by teachers and senior leaders and that suitable actions are taken in response to their feedback. This enables them to have a positive influence within the school. Pupils are positive about the introduction of a school council. They took great care in writing their election manifestos and anticipate that it will enable everyone's voice to be heard. The few pupils who have positions of responsibility, such as Fire Wardens and Class Reps, fulfil their roles enthusiastically.

Pupils take advantage of valuable opportunities to develop skills as empathetic and informed citizens. They celebrate a range of religious and cultural events such as Diwali and Hannukah and organise community activities such as a pyjama day for The Children's Trust. These activities give pupils purposeful opportunities to develop as global citizens, with a sense of responsibility towards the wider community.

Nearly all pupils are developing a sense of global responsibility and the importance of sustainability. They participate in workshops about recycling and currently recycle paper and plastic. Pupils appreciate the benefits of the plants that are found all around the school, both for their health and for the pleasant environment they create. For example, workshops on healthy eating develop most pupils' understanding of what they need to keep themselves well. Pupils enjoy participating in a range of sporting activities, both during the school day and outside of school.

Pupils demonstrate high expectations of conduct for themselves and for others and an awareness of well-embedded classroom routines. Nearly all pupils' behaviour, within classrooms and as they move around the school site during breaks and between lessons, is exemplary. Nearly all pupils are polite and show a caring attitude towards their peers. Grace, courtesy and mutual respect are well-embedded within the culture of the school.

Pupils co-operate well with each other, taking turns, and waiting patiently to start an activity, particularly in the Children's House when they need to wait for an activity to become free. Even the very youngest pupils manage their emotions extremely well. Beginning in the Toddler Community and all the way through the school, pupils select tasks and equipment independently, manage resources carefully and tidy up in an organised, disciplined and respectful way.

Nearly all pupils enjoy their lessons in many subject areas and convey a genuine interest in their work. Most pupils settle quickly to their chosen activities and demonstrate sound independent learning skills. Most pupils remain engaged throughout extended work cycles and demonstrate an exceptional level of concentration. Most pupils are confident and highly independent, and demonstrate excellent attitudes to learning. However, whilst pupils repeat activities over time to progress towards mastery, few pupils exhibit resilience as they do not always improve their work within the same lesson.

Teaching and learning experiences

The school follows a Montessori curriculum, focused predominantly on the development of skills and values for life-long learning. Kindness, respect, grace and courtesy are actively taught to pupils of all ages. The curriculum provides all pupils with a broad and balanced education that meets the requirements of the Independent School Standard Regulations (Wales) 2003.

In the younger years, the curriculum successfully prepares pupils for learning and is underpinned by objectives relating to self-regulation, concentration and self-confidence. The development of thinking and independent living skills is given the highest priority for the youngest pupils.

Through the Elementary phase, independent learning and self-direction are strong features of the curriculum, and an increased focus on acquiring literacy and numeracy skills enables pupils to access a range of topics. As the Montessori curriculum develops, pupils enjoy broader opportunities to learn about science and technology, humanities and expressive arts. Pupils enthusiastically complete interesting projects, such as investigative work into Inca engineering, Roman architecture and the world's most dangerous animals. These provide particularly worthwhile opportunities for deep learning and for pupils to develop their enquiry, presentation and thinking skills.

Throughout the school, the ethos is to provide authentic learning opportunities. For older pupils, 'Going Out' enhances the curriculum substantially. Recently, pupils have organised their own visit to Cardiff Museum, which prompted in-depth research into dinosaurs and a debate on the ethics of fossil collection.

Through after-school clubs, the curriculum is enhanced by a range of activities which provide pupils with valuable opportunities to develop their artistic, creative and strategic skills, and which pupils thoroughly enjoy. These include Taekwondo, ballet, cookery and craft.

The Montessori teaching approach is firmly embedded across the school. Staff have a strong understanding of the Montessori curriculum and the approach to facilitating learning. Teachers work as 'guides' to facilitate pupils' learning, which is sequenced so that their knowledge and skills build as they move through the school. However, this pupil-led learning journey means that pupils do not always consolidate and embed learning in the most effective timeframe.

Staff create a welcoming and secure learning environment in which all pupils feel safe and can flourish. They prepare and maintain an orderly classroom where all pupils can easily access high-quality resources and quickly develop sound working routines. Across the school, a wide range of interesting reading material is available and comfortable reading spaces inspire pupils to develop a love of reading for both inspiration and pleasure. Staff facilitate beneficial activities that focus on developing pupils' literacy and numeracy skills through concrete hands-on experiences.

Staff know their pupils extremely well. There are strong working relationships between staff and pupils based on mutual respect. Lead teachers and teaching

assistants work together highly effectively to support pupils' learning from their individual starting points.

Many staff facilitate discussions to extend pupils' understanding, for example when considering, 'which is stronger, gravity or air pressure?'. These staff often share a range of examples and model clear expectations, which enables pupils to understand what is required of them. A few staff are skilled at knowing when to intervene to address any misconceptions that may arise and help redirect pupils learning swiftly.

Staff have a clear understanding of the progress pupils make through direct observation within classes. Staff record when pupils have been introduced to, practise and master a concept. In keeping with the Montessori philosophy, pupils receive limited written feedback. Lead teachers meet with pupils on a regular basis to review their work and plan their next steps in learning. However, the verbal feedback provided to pupils is not always timely enough to enable pupils to improve their work or address misconceptions promptly.

Care, support and guidance

In all that it does, the school reinforces the values of kindness, honesty, respect and responsibility to 'Be Montessori'.

The school focus on personal development, well-being and values is extremely strong. The personal development and well-being of every pupil is a priority for school leaders and staff. All staff know their pupils extremely well and respond to their well-being needs effectively.

Through their studies and interactions with others, pupils learn respect for people from different backgrounds and faiths. Staff develop pupils' understanding of other faiths and cultures by teaching them about the religious and cultural festivals at relevant points in the year.

The school has valuable links with the local community and pupils benefit from a range of visitors. For example, St John's Ambulance teach pupils cardio pulmonary resuscitation (CPR) and a local charity speaks to pupils about the plight of asylum seekers and refugees. The school nurtures pupils to be caring, thoughtful and compassionate towards others and encourages them to consider those less fortunate than themselves, including raising money for a range of charities.

Staff encourage all pupils to perform in school productions, such as 'The Lion King', to develop their confidence and self-esteem. The school is developing the range of opportunities for pupils to take on responsibility and develop their leadership skills, including the School Council. These opportunities are available to all older pupils and the pupils who currently hold these roles take pride in their positions.

Through the Health and Well-being curriculum, pupils have extensive opportunities to acquire skills in keeping themselves healthy, forming positive relationships and staying safe. These opportunities meet pupils' inter-personal needs successfully. However, sex and relationship education and age-appropriate opportunities to learn about the dangers of drugs and alcohol are less well-embedded. Pupils enjoy taking part in a range of physical education activities including collaborative games, sports

and swimming. Younger pupils enjoy opportunities to learn and explore outside in the newly developed outdoor spaces and through Forest School activities.

The Additional Learning Needs Co-ordinator (ALNCO) raises staff awareness of pupils with additional needs and supports them effectively. Staff regularly review pupils' progress information to identify pupils whose progress is not in line with their ability or stage of development. In response, specific strategies are identified and delivered either in one-to-one or small group withdrawal sessions. These sessions focus mainly on numeracy, literacy or well-being. In addition, the ALNCO works with pupils to devise useful profiles of their individual learning needs and conducts lesson observations to quality assure the effectiveness of this work.

Leaders are developing a sound culture of safeguarding at the school, including within the curriculum, where pupils are taught how to keep themselves safe online. There are robust arrangements for recording and following up when pupils are absent. There is a well-understood system to report safeguarding concerns relating to pupils, and prompt action is taken to safeguard pupils if necessary. Staff know what to do when they have concerns and leaders respond to these referrals quickly and appropriately.

The school has thorough safer recruitment procedures and ensures that all new members of staff receive safeguarding training and annual updates are provided to all staff. A few issues relating to school policies and record keeping were raised with the school and these were addressed during the inspection.

Leadership and management

Cardiff Montessori School was established in 2016 by the proprietor and current headteacher. The headteacher promotes strong professional values and sets a clear, shared vision and ethos that everyone subscribes to. Through a determined focus on promoting well-being and personal development leaders have, in a relatively short period of time, successfully established a close family community to which pupils, parents and staff have great loyalty and affection.

Staff at all levels work together effectively in pupils' best interests and are proud of the trusting and caring relationships that exist throughout the school. As a result, nearly all pupils are happy, and many make strong progress through the Montessori curriculum.

Leaders have built and maintain outstanding relationships with parents, who see Cardiff Montessori School as an extended family as much as they do a school. Parents are well informed about their child's progress and the work of the school through a digital platform and detailed and individualised written reports. Formal and informal lines of communication between the parents and the school are effective and parents trust all staff to act upon any concerns they may raise. Parents share the ethos of the school and support their children with their Montessori learning and well-being at home.

Leaders are knowledgeable, compassionate and caring. They encourage staff to be reflective about their practices and have built a suitable range of professional relationships with other providers. There are sound arrangements for the

management of staff performance via an annual appraisal, which draws upon a broad range of information. In the very few historic cases where it has been identified, leaders have taken swift actions to address underperformance.

Leaders provide staff with worthwhile opportunities to engage in professional learning, which are closely linked to the school's Montessori approach and pedagogy. Newly appointed staff benefit from a supportive induction programme, including pathways, to become fully qualified 'Montessori Guides'. All staff undertake statutory training, which is updated as required.

Leaders' operational management of the school is extremely strong. Throughout the school, staff have clearly defined roles and responsibilities, supported by suitable job descriptions. Responsibility for important areas of the school's work,, such as safeguarding, curriculum or premise, are effectively distributed across the senior leadership team. Senior leaders meet weekly to discuss operational and strategic developments and regular purposeful whole-staff meetings ensure that everyone is kept well informed about what is happening in the school. Through these meetings, all staff contribute towards identifying school improvement priorities and consequently leaders have developed a comprehensive school development plan.

Leaders informally gather pupil progress and lesson observation data and, working collegiately with staff, use this to conduct regular reviews of pupils' progress. Much of the school's strategic planning and self-evaluation work is conducted informally and not recorded. Consequently, the school development plan is not prioritised, based upon strong evidence, and it does not focus sharply enough on the small number of areas in which the school may benefit from improvement.

The proprietor is committed to the improvement of the school and applies her broad range of expertise to support the school's work successfully. The proprietor has accurately identified the need for a person or body of people to act as a 'critical friend' to challenge leaders and ensure that quality assurance arrangements are robust and effective. However, this 'advisory board' has not yet been formed.

The school meets all of the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003.

Evidence base of the report

Before an inspection, inspectors:

- analyse the outcomes from parent/carer and pupil questionnaires and consider the views of teachers and support staff through their questionnaire responses

During an inspection, inspectors normally:

- hold a meeting with parents/carers to hear their views on the school and its effectiveness
- meet the headteacher, governors/proprietor(s), leaders and individual teachers to evaluate the impact of the school's work
- meet pupils to discuss their work and to gain their views about various aspects of their school
- meet groups of pupils in leadership roles, such as representatives from the school council and eco-committee
- visit lessons and undertake a variety of learning walks to observe pupils learning
- look closely at the school's self-evaluation processes
- consider the school's improvement plan and look at evidence to show how well the school had taken forward planned improvements
- scrutinise a range of school documents, including information on pupil assessment and progress, records of meetings of staff and the governing body (where appropriate), information on pupils' well-being, including the safeguarding of pupils, and records of staff training and professional development

After the on-site inspection and before the publication of the report, Estyn:

- review the findings of the inspection alongside the supporting evidence from the inspection team in order to validate, moderate and ensure the quality of the inspection

Copies of the report

Copies of this report are available from the school and from the Estyn website ([Estyn Website](#))

The report was produced in accordance with section 163 of the Education Act 2002. The main purpose of inspection under this section is to report on compliance with the Independent Schools Standards Regulations 2003. In schools that provide non-maintained nursery education, this report also satisfies the requirements of Schedule 26 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998.

Every possible care has been taken to ensure that the information in this document is accurate at the time of publication. Any enquiries or comments regarding this document/publication should be addressed to:

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