

Stratford Preparatory School and Montessori Nursery

Inspection report for early years provision

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ABOUT THIS INSPECTION

The purpose of this inspection is to assure government, parents and the public of the quality of childcare and, if applicable, of nursery education. The inspection was carried out under Part XA Children Act 1989 as introduced by the Care Standards Act 2000 and, where nursery education is provided, under Schedule 26 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998.

This report details the main strengths and any areas for improvement identified during the inspection. The judgements included in the report are made in relation to the outcomes for children set out in the Children Act 2004; the National Standards for under 8s day care and childminding; and, where nursery education is provided, the *Curriculum guidance for the foundation stage*.

The report includes information on any complaints about the childcare provision which Ofsted has received since the last inspection or registration or 1 April 2004 whichever is the later.

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The key inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding: this aspect of the provision is of exceptionally high quality

Good: this aspect of the provision is strong

Satisfactory: this aspect of the provision is sound

Inadequate: this aspect of the provision is not good enough

For more information about early years inspections, please see the booklet *Are you ready for your inspection?* which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

THE QUALITY AND STANDARDS OF THE NURSERY EDUCATION

On the basis of the evidence collected on this inspection:

The quality and standards of the nursery education are outstanding.

WHAT SORT OF SETTING IS IT?

Stratford Preparatory School and Montessori Nursery is an independent school for children aged from 2 to 11 years. The school opened in 1989, and is located in the

Old Town of Stratford-upon-Avon in Warwickshire. The nursery and reception classes are based in a self-contained building to the rear of the main school, with an adjacent fully enclosed outside play area. There are also opportunities for local walks and outings. The school has a large catchment area.

There are currently 159 children on roll in the school, with 56 children from two to five years in the nursery and reception classes, of whom 39 receive nursery education funding. Children may attend the nursery for a variety of sessions. Support is available for children with special educational needs and for those who speak English as an additional language.

The school is open during school term times. The school day is from 08:45 until 15:35. Nursery sessions are from 09:00 until 11:45 and from 12:45 until 15:15. Nursery children may stay for lunch between 11:45 until 12:30. There is an out of school club which provides care for children aged from three to 11 years, with sessions before school from 08:30 until 09:00 and after school from 15:15 until 17:30.

Eight full and part time staff work with the children, of whom four have a teaching qualification or a Montessori Diploma. The school receives support from an advisory teacher from the Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership. Representatives from the school regularly attend local early years partnership meetings. Teaching in the nursery classes is based on Montessori principles and practice. The head teacher is a member of the Independent Schools Association.

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PROVISION

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

The quality of teaching and learning is outstanding. Children benefit from excellent early years practice which ensures that they learn, achieve and develop to their full potential. Exceptionally high quality learning experiences are offered and these encourage three and four-year-olds to become sociable and curious learners who are confident and self-assured. Their learning rooms provide stimulating and challenging environments where children are encouraged to try things out, solve problems, investigate and become highly independent and self-assured. They are given time to practice and refine their skills and staff show genuine interest in what children do, offer encouragement to support and extend children's thinking and help them make connections.

Staff plan and provide activities that ensure children are both nurtured and challenged. All learning activities are carefully planned and organised and children make rapid progress as they make the most of the many practical and meaningful opportunities provided to help them develop their skills and knowledge. They are

treated as individuals and encouraged to explore at their own pace through a series of first-hand practical activities that follow the Montessori ethos. Morning sessions are used primarily to promote Montessori principles, with specific educational learning resources used alongside other interesting and stimulating materials to reflect the individual needs and interests of the children. Lots of creative and imaginative play is offered in the afternoons, with a separate role play room providing a rich environment that fosters children's imaginative play. The nursery garden is creatively resourced to encourage children to explore, experiment and be creative and specialist teachers for such things as ballet add to the richness of children's experiences. Staff show they are accomplished teachers who are knowledgeable about the Foundation Stage curriculum and how children learn. They provide clear learning outcomes that are based on children's different abilities and are skilled at engaging children so that they get the most out of their learning. Staff know when to intervene and when to encourage children to try things for themselves and this ensures children develop high levels of independence and achieve a great sense of satisfaction from learning things for themselves.

What children can do is the starting point for planning their future learning and resources and activities are used to best effect in providing a varied and progressive educational programme that blends Montessori principles with current early years thinking. Detailed information about each child is gained from parents before they start at the nursery and this is used to develop a phased approach to children's individual learning needs, with a particular emphasis placed on developing the child's whole personality. As a result, exceptionally positive relationships are developed between staff, the child and their parents. Staff are skilled observers and note children's responses to their learning, analyse the observations, highlight children's achievements to share with their parents and note if any further support is needed. Children's needs, interests and stages of development are considered when evaluating observations so that future purposeful activities can be planned that provide children with a coherent learning journey across their earliest years.

Children are exceptionally sociable and independent and so make excellent progress in the area of personal, social and emotional development. They are enthusiastic and independent learners who enter the nursery enthusiastically, behave very well and show they are confident, happy and feel secure. Many practical life skills are learnt as they prepare their own snacks or help to wash up and clear away their plates, and they show exceptional independence when washing their hands and taking off their craft aprons and hanging them up to dry. Children are confident in initiating their own learning and are excited and stimulated by the interesting activities on offer. They make close and positive relationships with staff and their friends and share, take turns and work together harmoniously. For example, children showed great skill when working together to wipe down the tables after snacks and when helping to put the dressing up clothes back on the hanger. They respond positively to the clear guidelines and expectations set by staff and show a strong sense of responsibility and self-motivation. They proudly share their news, show their friends the special things they have brought in from home and eagerly accept the reward stickers and medals given for their positive actions and willingness to try.

Children's communication skills are highly developed and this ensures they make excellent progress in the area of communication language and literacy. Children express themselves freely and with confidence as they play and learn and four-year-olds are quick to share what they know, recall events and answer questions. Rich learning opportunities encourage even the youngest children to express their ideas and they learn to listen carefully to each other and take turns in speaking during story and show and tell times. As a result, discussions are rewarding with everyone taking part and eagerly sharing their experiences and ideas. Imaginative and effective methods are used to help children to link sounds to letters. Three-year-olds link familiar objects to letter sounds and enjoy rhymes, songs and verse while four-year-olds are beginning to recognise familiar words. In the reception class, older four-year-olds eagerly complete a range of tasks that focus on letter shapes, sounds and word building and are encouraged to develop early reading skills through a reading scheme and fun yet challenging word games. French is taught from an early age within the nursery and this adds a richness to children's vocabulary as they learn to count, sing and repeat simple phrases in another language. Story times offer children the chance to act out familiar tales with props and puppets and to suggest different scenarios or what they think may happen next, and there are a wealth of good quality story and reference books provided for children to enjoy. Children's literacy skills are supported exceptionally well with staff using symbols and labels effectively to help children recognise that words have real meaning and making up songs and games to help even the youngest children learn to recognise their own names. Children make marks using a wealth of different materials and resources such as dough, sand, paint and soil and most older children are able to spell and write for their own purposes.

Children show strong skills in the area of mathematical development. They count confidently and show an excellent grasp of mathematical skills such as recognising and using numbers to calculate if there are more boys or girls present. A wide variety of excellent mathematical resources encourage children to count reliably and they are introduced to the concept of addition, subtraction, shape and weight in the context of everyday activities such as cooking, measuring and role play. Staff often use interesting topics to extend children's understanding of patterns, colours and shapes. For example, children looked at the patterns on wild animals and reproduced these as part of a topic which reflected their favourite story book.

Children respond eagerly to the wide range of challenging and fun activities that extend their skills in the area of knowledge and understanding of the world. Stimulating projects such as finding out about life cycles and the needs of plants and people help them to develop a very good understanding of the world around them, while specialist resources and exciting use of technology enhance their understanding and provide absorbing and fascinating learning opportunities. For example, children watched and learned about the life cycle of a frog through a web cam attached to the nursery manager's own garden pond. The use of information technology is a real strength throughout the Foundation Stage with child-friendly computer programmes and interactive white boards used creatively to promote children's understanding in all areas of learning. In the nursery garden, children become absorbed as they observe, investigate and explore with natural materials

such as dirt and sand and they plant and water vegetables and flowers. Simple science activities such as discovering what floats and sinks are included in their everyday activities and children become fascinated when building and constructing rockets and planets from different craft resources. Children are widely encouraged to talk about where they live, the places they visit and their home experiences, while visits to the town, market and local library expand and enrich their understanding of the local environment and community.

Three and four-year-olds show exceptional physical control due to the wide range of activities offered that build on and extend children's balance, coordination and spatial awareness. For example, they enjoy regular music and movement sessions, use a wide range of tools and equipment in the nursery garden and use large gym equipment in the hall. Regular physical education sessions encourage children to warm up their muscles and refine their balance skills as they play simple games such as 'walk-on-the-line' and they also learn to walk backwards and point their toes. These skills are then demonstrated as they enjoy running freely in the playground. They recognise the importance of keeping healthy as they are offered nutritious snacks and talk about food during lunchtime, while regular hand washing and project work ensure they develop independence and a sound awareness of the different aspects of a healthy life-style such as keeping safe, good hygiene and caring for their own well-being. Sit-and-rides, bikes, tunnels and obstacle courses encourage children to use their bodies in different ways and practical life resources, gardening, art and cooking activities allow children to develop good dexterity and skill in using different tools and small equipment.

Children's creativity is highly valued and encouraged across all areas of learning. They become engrossed in their imaginative games, act out familiar experiences through role play and creatively express their ideas in their artwork and construction play. They sing and join in with story telling sessions with gusto, enjoy making up their own games and use paint and other craft materials freely and with expression. Children's creativity is widely displayed around their learning rooms to show that it is valued and they are encouraged to express their thoughts freely and talk about their feelings during group discussions. Regular music sessions help children to further develop their imaginations and they listen carefully and sing joyfully when practicing for the school concert.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

Children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is fostered. Children flourish due to the high levels of quality interactions, support and encouragement that help them feel enthusiastic about taking part in all aspects of early education and school life. They develop a real sense of belonging as staff openly welcome their ideas and actively involve them and their families in the life of the nursery. Children feel valued because they are treated as individuals, are consistently listened to and their contributions are appreciated by attentive and caring staff. Children are constantly encouraged to talk about their families, experiences and home

achievements and their interests are often used as learning opportunities as they freely share what they know with their friends. Children behave really well. They are attentive and respond readily to staff requests, are kind, caring and helpful. Close relationships are developed as they help each other to keep their care rooms tidy, put away their toys and show respect for each other. They take responsibility for their own self-care and belongings, eagerly carry out simple tasks and play and work together really well. Discussions and practical activities give children a chance to explore a range of feelings and the possible consequences of different actions and words and these are discussed openly so that children develop an understanding of how to be sensitive to the needs of others.

Staff provide excellent support for all children attending the nursery and are fully committed to working closely with parents and other agencies to ensure children meet their full potential, taking account of their individual abilities and needs. Close links have been fostered with local outside support agencies and staff are clear over how to adapt both the curriculum and learning environment to ensure all children are included. Carefully considered resources, books, toys and activities are used effectively to ensure children develop very positive attitudes towards a range of family backgrounds, cultures and varying lifestyles. Each learning room has a cultural area where artefacts, objects of interest from different cultures and carefully chosen games and resources help children to consider the wider world and interesting topics further enhance children's interest and understanding. For example, children made Aboriginal paintings and boomerangs as part of a topic on differing people and the children's favourite story of 'Handa's Surprise' helped them to consider what life would be like in Africa.

Partnership with parents and carers is outstanding. Children really benefit from the warm welcome given to their families and the opportunities provided for them to become involved in the different aspects of nursery life. For example, they share in the learning at home with their children, share what they know about their child, attend concerts, sports days, open days and regular progress evenings. From the outset, strong relationships are established with children's families so that they feel comfortable with staff and feel secure about leaving their children at the nursery. Detailed information is gained about their child's personality, developmental stage, health and likes and this information is then used to discuss with parents how to move their children forward in their learning. Parents are kept exceptionally well informed at all times with daily discussions, a website, newsletters and information packs ensuring they understand and fully share in their children's early education. Photograph boards are carefully used to help parents understand the intentions of the Foundation Stage and how and what their children are learning and parents talk to staff at arrival and collection times to share information about their children's needs and achievements. Children's learning and progress is fully supported by their parent's input at home. For example, they are involved in project work through such things as helping their children to make space rockets and are encouraged to support reception children's early literacy skills through reading with their children and playing spelling games with them. Formal parents evenings are held each term when parents can see what their children have learnt, discuss their progress and agree the

next steps for their learning. They also receive positively written reports explaining how their child is settling in and progressing.

Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

The leadership and management of the nursery education is outstanding. The school principal, nursery and school staff have a shared vision of what they hope children will achieve and work effectively and collaboratively to ensure that children experience an exciting, balanced and effective educational programme that promotes their all round development. The Foundation Stage curriculum is creatively merged with Montessori principles to provide consistently high quality learning opportunities that are tailored to meet children's varying needs. Well considered reflection, evaluation and forward thinking allows both staff and management to consider how to maintain and improve the experiences offered to children, and this ensures continuing improvements are made which are based firmly on the outcomes for children. Teaching practice is regularly reviewed, carefully monitored and adapted to reflect children's changing learning needs and regular staff meetings are held to link teaching practice into the overall aims of the school.

Staff work exceptionally well together to ensure children make excellent progress. The nursery manager observes staff and works closely beside them to evaluate practice, model good teaching and help staff to review their practice and feel well supported in their individual roles. There is a strong collaborative approach throughout the school and this ensures nursery staff can work with reception teachers in order to monitor and support children's progress. This aids a smooth transition from nursery through to reception and further up the school. Staff are knowledgeable about the intentions of the Foundation Stage curriculum and effectively support, encourage and extend children's overall learning. Regular training opportunities are provided and these are used to encourage the implementation of improvements and change as well as fostering shared values and continuity of practice. Training and development plans are designed to meet the needs of both staff and the setting and there are effective appraisal systems in place that allow staff to discuss and evaluate the training received and set targets for future professional development.

Children benefit from a calm, rewarding and stimulating environment where they are encouraged to do their best. The learning environment plays a key role in supporting and extending children's overall development, while staff have high expectations and give children many opportunities to extend their personal skills and to challenge their thinking. Staff capture children's interests and place a high priority on helping children to develop independence, self-care and a thirst for learning. As a result children are focused, eager to learn and thoroughly enjoy the rich range of experiences offered.

Improvements since the last inspection

At the last nursery education inspection the provider agreed to review the organisation and management of reception class specialist music sessions to ensure four year olds are fully involved.

A full evaluation of music sessions was undertaken which identified the needs of the younger children within the reception class and led to the sessions being reorganised so that music time could be planned to suit the particular strengths and needs of the children and to encourage further cross-curriculum activities. As a result, children's learning in this area is now fully supported and they are able to fully enjoy their musical experiences and join in confidently.

THE QUALITY AND STANDARDS OF THE NURSERY EDUCATION

On the basis of the evidence collected on this inspection:

The quality and standards of the nursery education are outstanding.

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