

The Gower School

Independent School

Inspection report

DCSF Registration Number	206/6381
Unique Reference Number	134782
URN for registered childcare	131690
Inspection number	330425
Inspection dates	3–4 March 2009
Reporting inspector	Kanwaljit Singh

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as amended.

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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, the purpose of which is 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

The Gower School offers Montessori education for children from birth to the age of eleven years. At the time of the inspection there were 172 children on roll, of whom 95 (full-time equivalent) were under five years. The school is now registered to admit 50 pupils aged from 5 to 11 years; 21 pupils were in Key Stage 1 and 10 in Key Stage 2. The school is in the London Borough of Islington and operates from purpose-built accommodation on two sites about one and a half miles apart. The school started on the North Road site in 2000 as a Nursery. In 2007, the Cynthia Street site was opened and mainly accommodates Reception and Key Stage 1 and 2 pupils. There are three pupils who have statements for special educational needs and are funded by Islington local authority. In addition to these there are 50 children under the age of five for whom the school receives Nursery Education Grant funding from Islington. The school is open for 48 weeks in a year and runs breakfast and after-school clubs.

The school uses the Early Years Foundation Stage Framework and the National Curriculum. Its aim is for 'all children to be happy, confident learners who achieve their potential'. The school has the Islington Quality Assurance Investors in Children award and the Montessori School's Association accreditation. The Early Years Foundation Stage was inspected by Ofsted Children's Services in 2007. This is the school's first inspection.

Evaluation of the school

The overall quality of education at The Gower School is good, and provision for the welfare, health and safety of its pupils is outstanding. The school is successful in achieving its aims and pupils thrive in the family atmosphere. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Parents and pupils are positive about the school and pupils' behaviour is good. The quality of the curriculum and of teaching is good: as a result, pupils become confident and articulate learners who make good progress. The provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage is good. The school meets all but one of the regulations.

Quality of education

The quality of education and the curriculum are good in the Early Years Foundation Stage and in the main school. The National Curriculum, including French, and religious education are taught through the Montessori method in Years 1 and 2. Pupils participate in three-hour work cycles in the mornings and choose their activities, having negotiated a work programme with the teacher. In Years 3 to 5, good emphasis is placed on English and mathematics. Drama and music feature strongly within the curriculum and all pupils take part in a production or a concert during the year. Personal, social, health and emotional education are offered and include elements of citizenship, as well as sex and relationships education and drugs awareness.

Effective planning ensures that pupils develop basic skills in literacy and numeracy and speaking and listening as appropriate to their individual stages of development. In each class, planning takes account of individual needs and opportunities are taken to observe and record the progress being made. Specialist teachers take lessons in French, music, games and swimming. There is good provision for those pupils with a statement of special educational needs or those who need extra help with their learning. Pupils are well supported both in the classroom and in individual sessions by classroom assistants and specialists such as speech and language therapists. An outstanding range of trips and visits enriches the curriculum. Pupils enjoy a good variety of clubs. Reception children have good opportunities to visit Year 1 classes so that they become familiar with the staff and building.

The quality of teaching and assessment throughout the school is good including in the Early Years Foundation Stage. This enables pupils to make good progress. Pupils are well motivated; they behave well and have good attitudes to learning. Staff question well to check pupils' understanding, building on their previous knowledge and encouraging them to participate actively in lessons. However, on occasion, pupils are not given enough time to think through their answers.

Assessment is good. Teachers regularly evaluate pupils' individual learning plans and use the information well to plan future learning. Marking is variable, with some purely encouraging and the best being thorough, informative and motivating. Pupils say that they find it very helpful when they are given comments which develop their understanding of how to improve. Older pupils are set targets in English and mathematics and these are agreed with parents. Teachers have begun to record pupils' understanding, knowledge and skills of the subject in mathematics, English and science. However, this system is very recent and has not yet had an impact on pupils' achievement.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Their excellent personal development begins in the Early Years Foundation Stage. The personal, social and health education programme provides very valuable experiences for pupils to develop social skills and an understanding of life skills of value beyond school. Pupils have a clear grasp of what is right and wrong and they display a considerable degree of maturity in their attitudes to learning. They are responsible young people who are able to think for themselves and are confident to express their views. Their understanding of other cultures is well developed through music, art, food, literature and celebration of religious festivals such as Divali, Eid, Hannukah and Chinese New Year.

Pupils enjoy school very much as they remarked, 'We love school because teachers give us new activities and we have fun with our friends'. They are very keen learners, which shows in their good attendance and behaviour. They understand their responsibilities to the community and sing in an Age Concern Day Centre at Christmas and in the summer. They have raised funds for Montessori equipment for a school in Belize. The principal holds monthly meetings with groups of pupils to gather their views on how to further improve the facilities in the school. This is in preparation for starting a school council. Pupils' knowledge of British institutions is excellent as they have many visitors such as the Mayor of Islington, the local Member of Parliament and the leader of the Liberal Party. Pupils have good skills in literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT). This prepares them successfully for the next stage of their education and for their future economic well-being.

Provision for pupils' welfare, health and safety

Provision for pupils' welfare, health and safety is outstanding, including in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Pupils are encouraged to lead healthy and safe lives. They eat healthy meals cooked in the school kitchen and have physical exercise sessions in a sports centre and play in a nearby park every lunch time. They say that bullying is not an issue. Pupils handle equipment carefully and move around the school in a responsible way. Health and safety issues are checked carefully and are corrected effectively. Risk assessments of the building and when pupils go on visits are thorough. All the pupils interviewed said that they felt safe in school. The designated members and all other staff have undergone child protection training. The school complies with the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 2002 and has a three-year accessibility plan.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

The school undertakes the full range of checks to ensure the suitability of all staff to work with children, and the single central record of such checks meets requirements.

School's premises and accommodation

Both the buildings have purpose-built facilities for the school and are in a very good state of repair and decoration. They provide a safe and effective learning environment. The availability of specialist rooms, such as those for science/art, music, ICT/library help to extend the curriculum and support pupils' creative and aesthetic development successfully. The indoor areas are made attractive by stimulating displays of pupils' work and other learning resources. The small hall is used well for drama and dance. There is no outdoor area for Key Stages 1 and 2 pupils, but the school compensates for the limited accommodation well. However, there is no appropriate area for pupils who are ill during the day.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

Provision of information meets all the requirements. The school maintains very good contact with parents by regular telephone calls, e-mails, face-to-face meetings and home-school diaries. The prospectus, the parents' book, the file of school policies at the reception desk and the website provide good and relevant information. Parents are regularly given information on the work planned so that they can be involved in their children's learning. Every Friday parents are invited to come and see their children working in classes and talk to the teachers about their children's progress. Throughout the year at appropriate times, parents are invited to meetings to discuss their children's progress. Twice-yearly, written reports give good information on pupils' progress. Approximately one quarter of all parents either responded to the pre-inspection questionnaire or came to see the inspectors. The majority were entirely satisfied with the quality of the information received and the education provided. A minority voiced concerns which the school is addressing.

Procedures for handling complaints

The school has a detailed written complaints policy. It contains information on all the specific elements required by the regulations. There have been no complaints from parents.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

The overall effectiveness of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage is good. Children enter the school with expected levels of expertise in literacy and calculation. From birth to three years of age they achieve well in all areas of learning. Practical activities are organised well, resources are used effectively and children learn to become independent. Music sessions and staff expertise help children to appreciate

music and develop good listening skills. A very strong partnership with parents allows children to settle quickly, including those who have learning difficulties and disabilities. Children from minority ethnic groups are fully involved and their individual needs are met successfully. Children are assessed carefully but an overview of their attainment on entry and their subsequent achievement is not recorded. As a result, staff are not always aware of those who may be underachieving.

Children make good progress and attain standards that are above average by the start of Year 1. Staff use the Montessori methods effectively. For instance, children use their knowledge of letter sounds well when they read and write because of a structured approach to teaching. Staff assessments regularly highlight what children can do but they do not always record what they need to improve. Children's personal development is outstanding and their behaviour is excellent. All staff are trained in first aid for children in their early years. Risk assessments are completed carefully whenever children go out on trips such as visiting the library. Healthy lifestyles are promoted extremely well through play in the outdoor area and through the nutritious meals freshly cooked for them everyday. Levels of supervision are good and breakfast time is managed effectively.

The leadership is good. Effective management has improved significantly the use of ICT. For example, children enjoy listening to stories and use a computer to find out about different climates. Children are well involved in the local community. They sing to the elderly and raise money for Remembrance Day and learn about people who help us, such as the fire fighters.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school meets all of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as amended ("the Regulations"), with the exception of the one listed below.

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of the premises and accommodation (standard 5) and must:

- provide facilities for pupils who are ill, in accordance with the Education (Schools Premises) Regulations 1999 (paragraph 5(1)).

What the school could do to improve further

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

- identify children's starting points when they join the school so that teachers are able to measure children's progress by the end of Early Years Foundation Stage
- improve teachers' marking, particularly of Year 1 and 2 pupils' work, so that they know what they need to do to improve further.

Inspection Judgement Recording Form

outstanding	good	satisfactory	inadequate
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The quality of education

Overall quality of education		✓		
How well the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of pupils		✓		
How effective teaching and assessment are in meeting the full range of pupils' needs		✓		
How well pupils make progress in their learning		✓		

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

Quality of provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	✓			
The behaviour of pupils		✓		

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

The overall welfare, health and safety of pupils	✓			
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The quality of the Early Years Foundation Stage provision

How effectively are children in the Early Years Foundation Stage helped to learn and develop?		✓		
How well do children achieve in the Early Years Foundation Stage relative to their starting points and capabilities?		✓		
How good are the personal development and well-being of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage?	✓			
What is the quality of welfare, health and safety of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage?	✓			
How effectively is the provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage led and managed?		✓		
What is the overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage including, where relevant, the quality of childcare?		✓		

School details

Name of school	The Gower School		
DCSF number	206/6381		
Unique reference number	134782		
EY URN (for registered childcare only)	131690		
Type of school	Montessori		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	September 2000		
Age range of pupils	0–11		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 53	Girls: 41	Total: 94
Number of pupils aged 0-3 in registered childcare provision	Boys: 33	Girls:45	Total: 78
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need	Boys: 2	Girls:1	Total: 3
Number of pupils who are looked after	Boys: 0	Girls: 0	Total: 0
Annual fees (day pupils)	£8,250–9,810		
Annual fees (childcare)	£4,680-15,840		
Address of school	18 North Road Islington London N7 9EY		
	10 Cynthia Street Barnsbury London N1 9JF		
Telephone number	020 7700 2445		
Fax number	020 7609 1119		
Email address	info@thegowerschool.co.uk		
Principal/ Proprietor	Miss Emma Gowers		
Reporting inspector	Kanwaljit Singh		
Dates of inspection	3–4 March 2009		