

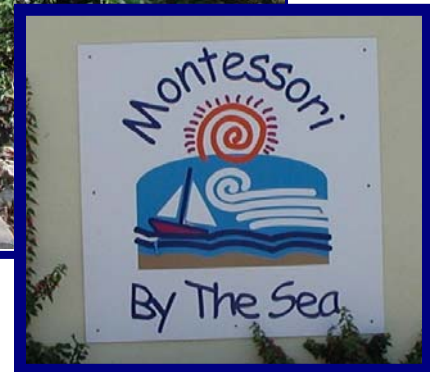


Montessori by the Sea

INSPECTION REPORT

1-3 March 2005

Lead Inspector: Steve Crowley



Cayman Islands Schools' Inspectorate

Working in partnership for high quality education for all students

Foreword

The aim of the Schools' Inspectorate is to contribute to continuous school improvement in the Cayman Islands, through rigorous external evaluations of schools and by providing high quality policy advice and training.

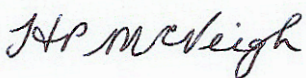
Each school receives an inspection every four to six years. The inspection identifies the school's strengths and the areas requiring improving. Between inspections, schools are visited regularly by a link inspector to check on the progress that has been made in tackling the priority areas and to support the school in its own self-evaluation.

Inspectors are guided by the criteria in the Cayman Islands *Handbook for the Self-Evaluation and Inspection of Schools*.

Inspections provide schools, parents and the community, the Education Department and the Ministry of Education, Human Resources and Culture with an external and impartial evaluation of the quality of a school's work and its impact on students' learning and the standards they achieve. Through the publication of inspection reports, inspection contributes to accountability, transparency and openness within the education system.

Self-evaluation by schools is considered to be an important part of the Cayman Islands school evaluation model. Together with inspections, self-evaluation provides a balanced system of internal and external accountability for schools.

The Inspectorate trusts that this inspection will prove helpful to the school, parents, the Education Department and the Ministry of Education, and will contribute in a positive way to making the school more effective.



Helena McVeigh
Chief Inspector of Schools

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL AND THE INSPECTION TEAM

THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Private
Age range of students:	Twenty months to nine years old
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
Number on roll:	79
School address:	Prospect Point Rd, Prospect
Telephone number:	947 0684
Fax number:	947 0794
Email address:	kmj_mbts@candw.ky
Name of Principals:	Debbie Thompson Kourtni Jackson

THE INSPECTION TEAM

All members of the team work for the Cayman Islands Schools' Inspectorate

Lead inspector:	Steve Crowley, Senior Inspector
Team inspectors:	Pachent Smythe, Inspector Helena McVeigh, Chief Inspector Mary Bowerman, Senior Inspector

INTRODUCTION

Information about the school

Montessori by the Sea is a private school that provides education for students from 20 months to nine years of age. Students are organised into classes that represent the developmental stages of growth, in line with the Montessori philosophy. The groupings are

- (1) Toddlers (20 months to three years) – one class
- (2) CASA (three to six years) – two classes
- (3) Lower Elementary (six to nine years) – one class

This report focuses on the provision the school makes for students aged three to eight years old. At the time of the inspection, none of the students had reached nine years of age.

The school is located approximately five miles from the centre of George Town, in what was, prior to Hurricane Ivan, an attractive setting by the sea. The building was designed as a purpose-built Montessori School. The damage sustained during the hurricane was quickly repaired and the school re-opened on 1 November, 2004.

At the time of the inspection there were 79 students on roll (35 boys and 44 girls). Only one student has been identified as having special educational needs. The school's population represents a relatively diverse range of nationalities and ethnic backgrounds.

The school's vision statement has been clearly documented. It states, "On a global level we envision a world community that coexists in harmony recognizing the inherent worth in us all. Our vision for Montessori by the Sea's school community is students who are passionate about learning; loving, dedicated and professional administrators and teachers, and supportive and involved parents."

The school's mission statement affirms, "At Montessori by the Sea we strive to create an environment that reflects the glory of life, where learning occurs naturally and is child-driven, providing each person with the opportunity to relish the inherent worth and the innate potential of all of us, thus developing a life-long love of learning.

By embracing the uniqueness of each individual, we work together to create lasting impressions as well as compassionate members of our global community."

Information about the inspection

The inspection took place from 1st to 3rd March, 2005 and involved a core team of two inspectors. In addition, some classroom observations that contributed to the inspection findings were carried out by other members of the Schools' Inspectorate outside of the inspection dates. The inspection covered all aspects specified in the *Handbook for the Self-Evaluation and Inspection of Schools*. In total, 27 lessons or parts of lessons were observed, mostly focusing on English and mathematics but covering all aspects of the curriculum offered. School documents, including teachers' planning, curriculum statements and guidelines, and information from parents were taken into account as well as samples of students' work. Comments made by parents at a meeting held prior to the inspection were also considered.

INSPECTION FINDINGS

How good is the school?

Montessori by the Sea is a well led and effectively managed school that provides good quality education for its students. There is a generous allocation of appropriately qualified and experienced teachers who are committed to the school and its students. Parents are supportive and the school has established good links with the community. The school is now well placed to act on the recommendations in this report and to move from strength to strength.

What the school does well

- Overall, students make good progress and their achievements are in line with or above expectations for their age¹ in most areas of learning.
- Students achieve well above expectations for their age in speaking, listening and reading.
- Students' personal development is very good.
- The teaching promotes effective learning in a high proportion of lessons; it is very good in music and modern foreign languages.
- The leadership has established a shared vision for the school, based on high expectations and a clear sense of educational direction.
- The school's curriculum is suitably broad and relevant to the interests and needs of the students. It promotes students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development effectively.
- The school provides effective support for students and ensures their welfare and safety.
- The school has established good links with the parents.

¹ References to "expectations for their age" are based on international comparisons.
Montessori-by-the-Sea Inspection Report
March 2005

What needs to improve

- Curriculum planning and assessment — which need to incorporate learning outcomes for the end of each project, theme or stage and communicate these to students.
- Monitoring and evaluation of practice — which need to identify priorities for future development and result in systematic planning.
- Some of the teaching approaches and lesson activities — which need to further enhance students' motivation and more consistently provide high levels of challenge.

The areas for improvement will form the basis of the school's action plan. The school is required to provide parents with an annual update on the progress that is being made in addressing these issues.

In their reports, inspectors use terms such as “very good” or “satisfactory” to describe the extent to which the school's work and students' outcomes meet the standards expressed in the criteria for inspection. These relate directly to the following five-point scale:

- | | | |
|----|-----------------------|--|
| 1: | <i>very good</i> | <i>(many good features, some outstanding)</i> |
| 2: | <i>good</i> | <i>(mainly good features)</i> |
| 3: | <i>satisfactory</i> | <i>(overall, meets basic requirements)</i> |
| 4: | <i>unsatisfactory</i> | <i>(requires some improvement in key areas)</i> |
| 5: | <i>poor</i> | <i>(requires substantial improvement in key areas)</i> |

How high are standards at the school?

The CASA Stage

The children are prepared well in the CASA classes for moving on to the Lower Elementary stage. Their achievements are at least in line with expectations for their age and with the benchmarks established for this stage by the school. Some children achieve standards well above those expected for their age. Nevertheless, some children could achieve even more if they were challenged or, in some cases, motivated more consistently in all areas of their learning.

The children's **speaking and listening** skills are particularly well developed. Many children use language in a very sophisticated manner when they talk to others, for example, about personally meaningful experiences. They explain themselves well when striving to resolve conflicts. The children tell stories from pictures and have fun with language as they discover rhyming words and retell stories. When **reading and writing**, all children establish left to right progression early on and are able to match pictures, letters and words, and recognise the difference between a letter sound and its name. They use a colour-coded language scheme to make phonetic and non-phonetic words and sentences. The children learn to use writing journals to record ideas, thoughts, feelings and events. Older children within the CASA classes are keen to read and fully recognise the benefits of learning to do so. They have a good basic understanding of letter sounds, which helps them to read and spell accurately. Students make good use of the quiet reading area and all enjoy being read to.

In **mathematics**, the children have an appropriate understanding of time and space. For example, they experience and describe the position of things in relation to each other using language such as 'middle', 'in front of', 'beside', and 'beneath' accurately. They know that clocks and calendars are used to mark the passing of time and they use conventional time units, such as 'yesterday', 'tomorrow' and 'next week' when talking about past and future. They are competent in their knowledge and use of number by the time they are ready to move on to Lower Elementary. Many children are able to count, add and subtract numbers when solving problems involving up to at least ten objects and in some cases up to 10,000.

The children develop good **fine and gross motor skills**. Even some of the three-year-olds are able to follow a pattern with neat stitches, hold a pencil properly, keep within the lines on their writing book and use a pair of scissors to cut out shapes accurately. During physical education classes, students' achievements are very good. They watch the teacher carefully and try hard to copy, for example, the stretching techniques demonstrated. They control their bodies well during exercises. For example, a high proportion of the students are able to stand on one leg, stretch their other limbs in different directions and hold the position well for relatively long periods of time.

The Lower Elementary stage

By the end of the **Lower Elementary stage**, standards of achievement in **English** are at least in line and, in many cases, well above those expected for their age, particularly in **speaking, listening and reading**. Although standards achieved by students in **writing** are at least in line with expectations, they are not consistently as high as in speaking, listening and reading. Standards of achievement in **mathematics** and **science** are broadly in line with expectations. Insufficient evidence was available to make judgements relating to standards achieved by students in information and communication technology (ICT).²

The students **speak** in interesting ways, communicating and exploring ideas effectively. Even during break and lunch periods, the students' interactions are characterised by their skilful and imaginative use of language as they comfort, cajole, persuade and have fun with one another. They listen attentively in class and ask relevant and probing questions during large and small group work. Students make good use of their well-developed knowledge of phonics to decipher unknown words when they are **reading**. They read fluently and with good expression. For example, they adjust the pitch of their voices to reflect the punctuation within a piece of writing. The students enjoy **writing** for a range of purposes. They record personal events, thoughts and ideas in their journals, while in social studies they present factual accounts of news items, such as those associated with the impact of the tsunami in South East Asia.

² ICT resources were damaged during Hurricane Ivan and had yet to be repaired or replaced at the time of the inspection.

However, students' writing skills could be improved if the teachers provided prompts that clearly stated what they should be trying to achieve with each piece of writing, for example, creativity, punctuation or neatness.

Students' knowledge and skills in aspects of **mathematics**, such as number, shape, space and measurement, and handling data, are better developed than their ability to use and apply these skills. For example, many of the students demonstrate good number skills during set tasks but are less confident when required to use them to solve real-life problems. The students sort and classify objects according to different criteria and represent their findings in simple charts or tables. They have an age-appropriate understanding of the use of standard and non-standard units to measure, for example, length and mass.

In **science** lessons, the students' explanations of "matter" demonstrate that almost all have an age-appropriate understanding of this concept. They know, for example, that matter can exist as a liquid, solid or gas and that heat can change its shape as well as the state in which it exists. The students use their existing knowledge well when they predict the outcomes of a proposed investigation. Some are able to gain insight from observing demonstration experiments but others need more practical activities in order to fully understand and remember key learning points.

Standards of achievement are very good in **music** and **French**. They are well above expectations for the students' age. Students know, and use accurately, terminology in **music**, such as, *forte*, *staccato*, *allegro* and *diminuendo*. They sing with energy and enjoyment, paying close attention to melody, pitch, tone and expression. They concentrate hard to memorise and use musical notation that helps them to clap out rhythms and beats accurately. Students are confident in their early use of the **French** language. They try hard to achieve the correct accent after listening carefully to the teacher's good modelling. The students are aware of their progress, which motivates them to go on learning.

How effective is the teaching and what impact does it have on students' learning, their personal development and the standards they achieve?

The quality of teaching and learning is good. In the lessons observed, teaching and learning ranged from satisfactory to very good. They were always very good in music and French. There was a strong correlation in all lessons between the quality of the teaching and students' progress and achievements.

The teaching promotes the development of students' **speaking and listening skills** very effectively. Students are given some opportunities to apply their **numeracy skills** in subjects other than mathematics, but in an incidental rather than a planned manner.

More opportunities should be provided for students **to use and apply the skills** they learn in mathematics to real-life situations. Good opportunities are presented in all classes for students to develop **independent, cooperative and collaborative learning skills**.

In general, the calm, safe learning environment established in all classrooms provides a firm foundation from which students feel emotionally secure, ready to deal with challenges and to take risks as they learn. Classrooms are well ventilated, have good light and provide students with access to water so that they are physically well prepared for learning. The rooms' attractively presented, up-to-date displays of students' work reflect their achievements, promote high self-esteem, and reinforce what the students have learned. The lessons are well prepared and presented in a logical sequence, which helps students to understand, for example, the relationship between cause and effect in science. The value that the teachers place on all students' contributions encourages them to ask questions and share ideas. The well-organised, structured, classroom layouts enable students to move around the room without fuss, and to confidently access materials as they need them. The teachers have established simple but effective classroom procedures that keep frustration levels to a minimum. For example, the students have been taught to place a hand on the teacher's shoulder when they need her attention.

The teachers have good subject knowledge. They provide clear explanations and ask questions that deepen students' thinking, challenging them to make use of what they have previously learned to understand new concepts. The opportunities provided for students to work individually and in small groups help them to develop independent learning, as well as cooperative and collaborative skills.

In the best lessons seen during the inspection, teachers were vigilant about keeping all students engaged in their work so that they rarely became frustrated or bored. When teaching the whole class, teachers used a range of visual, auditory and tactile approaches that involved, for example, action songs or hand puppets, to appeal to students' different learning styles and sustain their interest and help them remember. As lessons progressed, the teachers accurately assessed students' strengths as learners and modified the activities or teaching approaches to provide suitably challenging work. For example, one teacher's knowledge of a student's skills resulted in her being asked to undertake a simple, but effective, science activity about air pressure. In the very good lessons, students were given opportunities to practise and extend their knowledge and skills by presenting what they have learned to their peers. For example, the students demonstrated their ability to pronounce French words correctly as they spoke aloud to the rest of the class. The teachers constantly checked that students understood their work by providing activities that required them to use and apply their knowledge. In physical education, the teachers used imagery and visualisation strategies effectively to capture the students' attention, increase their motivation, and help them memorise important elements of the movements they performed.

Even though teaching, learning and students' progress are good, they could be even better if

- Teachers' plans clearly identified what the students will know, understand and be able to do by the end of a task, lesson or series of lessons. This would help teachers maintain their focus throughout the lesson and, if shared with the students, enable both to assess what progress has been made by the end of the lesson.
- Students and teachers worked together to agree what constitutes a good piece of work for each task. This would help students to focus their efforts and assess their own performance.

- The activities provided suitable levels of challenge, more consistently for all the students.
- Teaching approaches, particularly to the whole class, consistently provided opportunities for the students to learn through visual, auditory and tactile involvement.
- Teachers helped all students to remain on task, where they sometimes become frustrated or disinterested and waste time.
- More opportunities were provided for students to apply the knowledge and skills they acquire to real-life situations.
- Better use was made of ongoing assessments of students' strengths and weaknesses as learners to guide and adjust how and what is taught.
- ICT was used more often (when resources are available) to develop students' learning and research skills.

How effective are the curricular opportunities and assessment arrangements at the school?

The quality of the curriculum is satisfactory. It has important strengths, but there are also some areas that could be improved further.

The effective way that classrooms are organised and the grouping arrangements enable students to have good access to all areas of the curriculum. The curricula for **CASA** and **Lower Elementary** are broadly-based and relevant to the students' creative, intellectual and personal development (including spiritual, moral, social and cultural) needs and interests. They are underpinned by a sound rationale, based on the teachings of Maria Montessori that are consistent with the school's published mission and aims. The school has further enhanced the curriculum by including opportunities for students to learn a **modern foreign language**. However, at the Lower Elementary Stage in particular, the students have limited experiences of important aspects of **physical education**, such as selecting and applying skills and tactics in games activities. They also currently have limited access to all aspects of **ICT** (but see footnote on previous page).

Students' **personal development** needs are particularly well catered for. They are very well supported and encouraged to take responsibility for their own belongings and actions. There are structured opportunities for them to resolve conflicts without over-reliance on the intervention of an adult. Meal tables in each of the classrooms encourage students to develop appropriate social skills. Theme and project work focussing on, for example, Asia, involve them in learning about and enjoying different cultural life-styles and perspectives.

The curriculum plans clearly indicate what should be covered but they do not specify how much time needs to be spent on each subject over agreed periods of time. Consequently, it is very difficult for the curriculum managers to reliably monitor the implementation of the curriculum.

The school aims to develop curricular experiences that build on students' prior learning.

However, the current curriculum planning and recording mechanisms do not provide enough information on what the students are expected to know, understand and be able to do by the end of each project, module or stage. This makes it difficult for the school to accurately assess students' progress and standards of achievement, or the impact of the curriculum on their learning.

There is no whole-school assessment policy. The school makes use of curriculum benchmarks and teachers maintain records of what each student has covered, which enables them to gain some insight into how well the students are performing. However, the arrangements for tracking students' progress and achievements do not currently provide teachers or students with all the information they need to improve. Students receive good informal, verbal feedback that helps them know how to improve, but too often they are unsure of what is expected of them and, in some cases, whether they have performed well or not. There are few planned opportunities for students to assess their own progress against agreed criteria.

The school could improve its curriculum and assessment arrangements if

- Provision for physical education and ICT were strengthened.
- Appropriate time was allocated for each subject and its implementation monitored.
- Expectations for what students should know, understand and be able to do by the end of each project, theme or stage were agreed and used to assess their progress.
- A whole school policy, which focuses on strategies for assessing students' progress against agreed criteria was agreed and implemented.

How well is the school led and managed?

Overall, the school is effectively led and well managed. The school leaders have successfully promoted a vision for the school that is now shared by the staff, including those that were only recently recruited. The expectations for school staff are clearly documented in regularly-reviewed policies and guidelines in the Employee Handbook. The mission, values and aims of the school, which focus on promoting effective learning and personal development, are evident in the day-to-day running of the school. Parents who spoke with inspectors were very supportive of the school.

The principals and other staff are good role models for the students. Both principals maintain a high profile in and around the school at the beginning and end of the day and between lessons. They make themselves easily accessible and are open to ideas and suggestions. Issues relating to effective communication are regularly reviewed and refined; staff reported that these have led to significant improvements. Communication is now good. The roles and responsibilities of various staff, including the principals, are underpinned by clear rationale and are understood by staff, students and parents. Teachers have been provided with appropriate professional development, but further opportunities to identify and share good practice in and across the school need to be found.

The current arrangements for monitoring and evaluating important aspects of the school's work, such as teaching, learning and the curriculum, should be strengthened. The school's programme for regularly monitoring and evaluating teaching and learning has resulted in the consistent implementation of many of the desired teacher behaviours outlined in the Employee Handbook. This has helped to create classroom environments that are conducive to effective learning. However, there needs to be a clearer focus on the positive and negative features of the teaching and their impact on the students' learning. In addition, opportunities for teachers and students to work together to find ways to monitor the implementation of the curriculum ensuring, for example, that enough time is spent on each subject, is an area for further development.

There is currently no formal approach for identifying priorities or planning systematically. However, the senior staff have a clear idea of how they want the school to develop and they are committed to continuous improvement.

All staff demonstrate loyalty and commitment to the school and its underlying principles. They give generously of their time and energy.

They are open and responsive to suggested changes and committed to working together to further develop the school. The school has, with its current staff, the capacity to strengthen further its provision and improve students' outcomes.

The school would be even better led and managed if

- Procedures for monitoring and evaluating its work were strengthened.
- A more systematic approach to planning future development was adopted.

How effective are other aspects of the school's work?

The school has established supportive partnerships with most of the **parents**. Many of the parents expressed their appreciation of the informal and formal communication they receive from the school. The well-established **links with the local community** help to enrich students' curricular experiences and have been effective in promoting and maintaining a generally positive image of the school across the Island. The students receive very good **support** while they are at school. Daily routines are understood and practised by the students so that stress levels are kept to a minimum.

The teachers are alert and sensitive to the needs of all the students. The high levels of supervision and vigilance from the staff ensure that **students' welfare, health and safety** are promoted effectively throughout each day. Although there is a need for improved library, ICT and physical education facilities, overall, the school has sufficiently well-qualified **staff**, suitable **accommodation** and adequate **resources** to meet the demands of the curriculum.

