

FULL INSPECTION REPORT FOR MARIA MONTESSORI INSTITUTE

UKVI LICENCE No: QFE97RAR6

Education oversight inspection of private further education colleges on behalf of the Home Office's division of United Kingdom Visas and Immigration (UKVI)

The overall inspection findings for this college

UKVI Standards for

courses and qualifications are	MET
teaching, learning and assessment are	MET
the cultural and moral development of students are	MET
welfare, health and safety are	MET
the effectiveness and suitability of staff are	MET
financial sustainability, leadership and governance are	MET
premises and accommodation are	MET
information and complaints are	MET

Compliance with UKVI Standards

The college meets all the UKVI Standards

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INTRODUCTION

Purpose and scope of the inspection

Mainland Education is an approved educational oversight body authorised by the UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI) section of the Home Office to inspect privately funded further education colleges in England, with a Steiner, Montessori or Eurythmy basis or background, or with a clear religious purpose. Inspection is designed to assess the college's compliance with the Standards for colleges agreed with the Home Office. The Standards for Educational Oversight (EO) cover the quality of education and welfare provided to all students, including those from overseas who are sponsored by the college for Tier 4 visas, and, where applicable, those who are under eighteen or are vulnerable adults. On-site student accommodation, where provided, is assessed for compliance with the Standards but is not subject to a full boarding inspection. Inspection provides objective and reliable reports on the extent to which colleges meet the Standards. By placing reports in the public domain, the information they contain is available to students, the UKVI, and the wider community.

Inspection takes account of the context of each individual college, and of how it evaluates its own performance and demonstrates its success. It helps colleges, their staff and trustees, governors, and proprietors to recognise and build on their strengths and to identify and remedy their weaknesses in relation to compliance. The inspection also takes account of the college's financial performance over the last two years for new providers and since the last inspection for established providers. An assessment is also made of the college's financial sustainability going forward, on the basis of information provided by the college. Prospective students, their parents and agents should make their own enquiries into the financial viability of institutions before accepting a place.

Colleges are subject to a full inspection once every four years which is usually conducted by two inspectors over two days. In the intervening years, colleges receive an interim inspection and are kept under review. All reports state whether or not the college continues to meet the agreed Standards.

The Maria Montessori Institute last received a full EO inspection in 2016 and an interim inspection in 2019, when it was judged to be meeting all the Standards. The college was visited by inspectors from UKVI in connection with Tier 4 visa arrangements in March 2023.

Characteristics of the college

The Maria Montessori Institute (MMI) is an independent college providing full- and part-time courses which train students to teach children in the methods developed and espoused by Maria Montessori. The college's training centre is located in central London, with an administrative head office in Hampstead. MMI also owns an independent Montessori school (for children aged 2.5 – 14 years), "The Maria Montessori School", which is located at five sites across north and west London, one of which is a bilingual Mandarin centre. The school was last inspected by

Ofsted in June 2022 when it was judged to be providing a good quality of education. The students do teaching practice in the Maria Montessori Institute's own Children's Houses and in around twenty other Montessori schools and nurseries which have been approved by the college for this purpose.

Students come from all over the world to attend the college and train in Montessori methodology. This year there are thirty-six full-time students on roll, twenty-four of whom are based in the UK; and twelve international students who are sponsored on Tier 4 visas. Fourteen students follow the course on a part-time basis. All of the students are aged over eighteen. The college offers a number of courses, the core one being the Association Montessori Internationale (AMI) Diploma course training teachers of children aged 3-6 years, which may be taken as an intensive full-time one-year course; or as a two-year course, also full-time but conducted at a steadier pace; or as a part-time evening course. The Diploma course incorporates the Early Years Educator (EYE) Level 3 Diploma, accredited by Innovate Awarding Ltd., which is approved by the UKVI. Students taking the Diploma Course over two years have the option to take a Foundation degree in Montessori Pedagogy awarded jointly by AMI and the University of East London. Nine students are currently following this course.

The college also offers AMI Diploma courses for teaching children aged 0-3 years, and 6-12 years. The former is comprised mainly of in-person modules taking place in London during the summer months. The latter is a combination of online and modular elements which are in-person during the Easter holidays. There are also AMI Orientation courses available for Montessori teaching assistants online. The Institute is also a centre for training Montessori trainers.

SECTION A: Main Findings and Actions Required

Main findings

The Maria Montessori Institute meets all the UKVI Educational Oversight Standards. The college is world-renowned as a centre of excellence for teacher training in Montessori methodology and attracts students from all over the world. It is held in high regard by the students who value the excellent blend of intellectual challenge and practical experience the courses provide. The courses offered to students who are sponsored for Tier 4 visas are at a suitable level to meet UKVI purposes. They are well-planned and documented, lead to externally validated qualifications and are delivered by highly-trained, experienced and expert trainers. Training is of excellent quality and offers a high level of both challenge and support to students of all abilities, so that each individual can make very good progress according to their abilities and effort. Retention, completion and pass rates are high. The students work hard; assessment is a very strong feature; and they regularly receive excellent feedback on their written and practical work which enables them to learn and make rapid improvement. Pastoral care is excellent, as is the students' cultural and moral development, which reflects the Montessori ethos and philosophy of the college. The wide cultural diversity of the students is well-respected and reflected in the inclusive environment. Students feel that the college cares about them personally and tutors are always on hand to offer practical support and guidance with their studies or any matters of personal concern. Students make good friends and work together well, showing respect for one another. The college is very well led and managed; enjoys the strong support of engaged trustees; and is run effectively by efficient administrators. There is a comprehensive range of policies to guide its work which are available online and in the respective handbooks provided to staff and students. The required pre-employment checks are made on the suitability of staff and recorded appropriately, and all students are vetted prior to undertaking teaching practice. Finances are managed prudently and sustainably, and the college is well-resourced for the benefit of the students and in line with its aims. The training centre, in central London, provides a pleasant modern environment in which to train, and is well-equipped with Montessori resources and books. The policies and procedures for welfare, health and safety are clear and are implemented carefully. The college has an appropriate complaints procedure. It responded rapidly to some minor points for improvement raised in the course of the inspection.

Overall Main Finding	Compliance	Outcome for the College
The college meets UKVI requirements.	It meets all the Standards.	It will receive interim checks and a further full inspection in four years

Actions Required

- No action is required

SECTION B: Detailed evaluation of the standards

Standards for courses and qualifications

The Standards for courses and qualifications are met. Most sponsored students with Tier 4 visas take a one-year full-time Montessori teacher training course leading to the Association Montessori Internationale (AMI) Diploma (3–6-year-olds). A smaller number of sponsored students take the same course over two years which is also full-time but is conducted at a steadier pace. The course incorporates an Early Years Educator (EYE) component that leads to the EYE Level 3 Diploma awarded by Innovate Awarding Ltd. This is a requirement for those wishing to practise in UK schools and for sponsored international students studying on a visa. The EYE course meets RFQ (Regulated Qualifications Framework) Level 3, a suitable level for UKVI Tier 4 visa purposes. Other courses offered by the college are an evening-session two-year AMI Diploma (3–6-year-olds) and a Foundation degree (Level 5) in Montessori Pedagogy validated by AMI and the University of East London. Additionally, the college offers online courses covering a variety of Montessori provision including AMI Orientation (formerly the Assistants Certificate), emotional well-being for parents, adolescence, dementia, disability and ageing. It is also a centre for continuing professional development for Montessori-trained teachers. All Tier 4 sponsored students follow full-time courses that require at least 35 hours per week full-time study, meeting and exceeding UKVI requirements. The college is an awarding centre for AMI, Innovate Awarding Ltd., and the University of East London and meets the requirements of all three awarding bodies.

The college makes clear to all sponsored students the level of competency in English which is required to undertake the course of study. They must all have passed the appropriate IELTS (International English Language Testing System) test to Level B as required by UKVI. Prospective students must also submit a written statement in English and are interviewed in English prior to acceptance where the college thinks this may be necessary. Regular meetings between students and their tutors ensure that any need for support with English is readily identified and remedied. Support is also provided through an online learning management platform where students can access recordings of lectures, lecture notes and other course materials, and through which their written work is submitted and assessed. The proportion of students completing the AMI course is consistently very high and virtually all students attain the AMI qualification. The college focuses exclusively on Montessori teacher training and all the courses are fully compatible with its declared Montessori ethos. All courses are very well planned and interspersed with assessment tasks. In addition, students have opportunities for teaching practice at approved Montessori schools or nurseries, from which they derive great benefit.

Standards for teaching, learning and assessment

The Standards for teaching, learning and assessment are met. The quality of teacher training is excellent. Sessions are well-planned with clear aims and objectives. Tutors know the students well and have high expectations of them, Education Oversight inspection of Maria Montessori Institute, 5-6 December 2023

offering an appropriately high level of challenge and individual support for all levels of ability. Thus, the students make very good progress, relative to their ability and effort, and many report that after the initial effort put into grasping the principles of Montessori philosophy, they loved the course and its challenges. The quality of debate among students is strong. Of particular note in the practical group sessions were the opportunities for critical self-evaluation and peer evaluation which offered perceptive and useful observations in a respectful way. The quality of feedback from staff during class activities and presentations is exceptional, so that each contribution is praised for its strengths, and suggestions are offered which lead to further improvement. Assessment is a strong feature of the course, and includes both written and practical assignments. Students' essays and other assignments are marked thoroughly and carefully under the headings of understanding, use of literature, structure and organisation, and referencing, so that all students know how well they are progressing and how to improve. As part of practical sessions, they learn how to handle the Montessori equipment respectfully, how to convey this to children, and why it is important to put it away carefully after activity, so that children learn to do the same. Tutors encourage students to notice the importance of fine details and to consider the child's perspective and their options for choice when preparing and setting out activities. There is an aura of calmness, gentleness and respect about the teaching rooms. Students undertake three periods of teaching practice in a school or nursery setting, and those who had already done some teaching practice said that they valued highly these opportunities for putting theory into practice, learning from experienced teachers and seeing the impact of Montessori methodology on children's learning.

Because all sponsored visa students who are non-native speakers of English understand the level of English required to access the course and have passed the required IELTS test, the college does not put on additional English as a second language lessons. Staff are aware that the students develop their knowledge and command of the language as they go through the course, in their practical training sessions, writing assignments, and through simply working with others. Trainers take every opportunity to extend the students' understanding and use of English language through discussion, and encourage them to do so with children in a nursery setting, but it might also be helpful in addition to have a list of specific Montessori terms available for all students, so that non-native speakers can look them up in advance and not feel at a disadvantage at the outset. The range of spoken English among students varies widely, with some students showing substantial fluency and accuracy, whereas others display a good understanding of the language but speak with a strong accent which might be difficult for young children to understand.

Standards for cultural and moral development of students

The Standards for the cultural and moral development of the students are met. Students come to the training centre from all over the world and this cultural diversity is much valued by staff and students alike. The students speak in a considered and thoughtful way about the AMI Diploma course and the positive impact it has had on them, especially on how it enables them to develop critical thinking skills and self-awareness, and encourages sensitive interaction with

children and adults. In practical lessons and seminars, the students are encouraged to ask questions and work through their own ideas under the expert guidance and critique of tutors. Group discussion is a key element of their training, for example in the 'discussion cafe' where staff and students talk about different child development topics. In keeping with its Montessori ethos, the college successfully promotes the importance of responsible behaviour and respect for the wide range of differing views, cultures and beliefs among the student body. The students complete an equality, diversity and inclusion questionnaire that gives tutors a useful agenda for the exploration of these issues, and all students have completed the 'Prevent awareness' (anti-terrorism) training. The college values the cultural diversity among students, for example, in one seminar students gave a presentation about Christmas traditions which they had prepared for young children, and the rest of the group provided feedback. The festivals and traditions of other religious faiths and cultures are examined similarly at other times of the year, giving everyone the opportunity to give a presentation and thereby extend their peers' knowledge and understanding.

Standards for welfare, health and safety

The Standards for welfare, health and safety are met. The college has proper regard for the health and safety of students, staff and visitors. Up-to-date policies and procedures for health and safety are in place and can be seen on the website. Accident and incident records are well maintained. There are trained First Aiders on site and First Aid kits are readily accessible. Fire safety provision conforms to legal requirements. There is a fire safety policy on the website. A fire safety log records fire drills, which are held twice termly: one during the daytime and one in the evening, weekly fire alarm tests and extinguisher checks. Fire exit signage and emergency lighting are in place; exit routes are kept clear and the college ensures that all fire exit doors are in working order. The college has two trained fire marshals and there are plans to train more. External fire risk assessments are carried out annually: the most recent took place on 14th September 2023. The college has a well-established electronic system of recording admissions, with all relevant information in place including students' visa details. Attendance registers are carefully maintained in electronic form, with student absences followed up quickly and procedures in place for reporting to UKVI in the event of serious non-attendance issues.

The college provides sensitive pastoral care for students. Each student has an appointed tutor who is responsible for their well-being during their time in college, to whom they know they can turn with any concerns of an academic or personal nature and find help. All students receive safeguarding and child protection training to prepare them for teaching practice with young children in a school or nursery setting immediately prior to undertaking their first teaching practice, and they all appreciate the importance of this. All students have an up-to-date DBS check on their suitability to work with children and also complete Prevent training prior to going on teaching practice.

Standards for the effectiveness and suitability of staff

The Standards for the effectiveness and suitability of staff are met. The college has recruited and retains sufficient qualified, knowledgeable and experienced trainers and other personnel to operate effectively and support its aims and ethos as a Montessori training centre. All trainers are specially selected from qualified and experienced Montessori teachers and have undertaken further exhaustive training at the Institute to become teacher trainers. The required checks are made on all employees' and trustees' identity, nationality, right to work in the United Kingdom, references and qualifications, where relevant. Prior to confirmation of appointment, they also undergo an enhanced DBS check and an overseas police check, where relevant. The same checks are made on students prior to undertaking teaching practice in a school or nursery setting as they will be working with young children. The college's Single Central Register records correctly the outcome of all the staff checks which the college has conducted and these are dated and verified appropriately. The evidence of such checks is held in a secure personal file by the human resources manager at the administrative office. There are no vulnerable adults nor students under the age of eighteen and the college does not use temporary, supply or agency staff. There have been no cases of suspension or disciplinary action against members of staff on safeguarding grounds, but the college officers are aware of how to deal with and report such events should they occur.

Standards for financial sustainability, management and governance

The Standards for financial sustainability, management and governance are met. The college is very well-led and managed for the benefit of its students. Its work is steered by a team of trustees who are closely engaged in the life of the college and visit regularly. The trustees meet on a regular basis at Board meetings and through steering committees and engage well with college leaders and managers. They have generated a comprehensive range of policies and procedures to guide the smooth operation of the college and its training function, which meet all statutory requirements and are routinely reviewed on an annual basis, or more frequently if necessary. The policies are implemented carefully by an efficient team of staff and administrators working together to ensure that the college consistently delivers excellent Montessori training in a positive, respectful and inclusive environment, as befits its ethos. Extensive up-to-date information is available to students, prospective students and other readers on the website and in the respective handbooks for staff and students. The training centre is strongly supported by its staff, accommodated in suitable and well-maintained premises and is well-equipped with resources for the training of Montessori teachers. The company's finances are managed prudently, are audited and open to public scrutiny. They are kept under active review, and this informs trustees' decision-making and allows them to take advantage of grants and charitable funding, draw up business plans and generate accurate forecasts. The Institute has a secure financial basis which gives confidence that current and future students will be able to complete their courses and that other initiatives may be developed as required over time.

Standards for premises and accommodation

The Standards for premises and accommodation are met. The college is located on the ground floor and basement of a secure and well-maintained modern office building in central London. There is a large foyer, two model Montessori classrooms, two lecture rooms, workrooms and meeting rooms, administration offices, a library, a pleasant social space with a dining area and a small outdoor space with stairs and a lift connecting the two levels. The bathroom facilities include a disabled toilet and a shower. The college has measures in place to enable special needs or disabled students to access courses on both levels of the building. There is a small dining area where students can consume their own food or reheat food in a microwave oven, but no food is provided by the college. The premises and accommodation are of high quality: spacious, clean, well-lit and well-ventilated, and are not used for any purpose other than the delivery of the college courses. Students and staff appreciate the excellent accommodation and value its capacity to enable the effective teaching of courses, including the safe and accessible storage of a substantial amount of Montessori equipment.

Standards for information and complaints

The Standards for information and complaints are met. The college has a comprehensive website that gives students and prospective students access to up-to-date information about the college and the courses and facilities it offers. The college also provides further information to prospective students on demand. Some said that they had themselves been educated in Montessori schools and wanted to continue their Montessori journey through training as teachers in the discipline. Others had heard of the college and its reputation through contact with Montessori schools in other countries.

The students are well-informed about their progress, through regular contact with staff, frequent verbal feedback from tutors and close marking of written assignments. Each student also has a mid-course interview with a member of staff that focuses on performance in the full range of course activities including writing about theory, contributions to discussions and practical work. This results in a useful written record and a letter to the student detailing the progress they have made and areas for improvement, including a clear statement where course session attendance has been less than required, and how the student can remedy this.

The college's website and students' handbook include a suitable complaints procedure that shows how formal complaints should be dealt with and sets out appropriate timescales. The college has recently renamed this policy from grievance procedure to complaints procedure to ensure that students are more aware of it. The college has not received any formal written complaints.

SECTION C: COLLEGE INSPECTION DETAILS**Details of college**

Name of college	Maria Montessori Institute
Address of college	41, Riding House Street, London, W1W 7BE
Telephone number	0207 435 3646
Email address	info@mariamontessori.org
Proprietor	Maria Montessori Training Organisation
Name of Principals	Lynne Lawrence, Louise Livingston
Licence number	QFE97RAR6
Type of college	Private College of Further Education

Details of student body

Age range	18+ years
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Number on roll for 2023-24		UK students	International students	Total
	Full Time:	24	12	36
	Part Time:	14	0	14
	Below 18	0	0	0

Annual fees	£9,400 (Early Bird); £11,900 (Standard fee)
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Details of inspection

Type of inspection	Educational Oversight: Full	
Inspection Team	Reporting Inspector:	Mrs. Jane Cooper
	Supporting Inspector:	Mr. Peter Jones
Dates of inspection	5-6 December 2023	