

What happens after the accreditation visit?

In the fourth part of a series of articles on the accreditation process, **Barbara Isaacs** outlines what happens after the assessor's visit.

Having spent a day in your setting observing, perusing your documentation, and speaking to teachers and parents, the Montessori assessor will give the head of the school and the team feedback which will celebrate good practice as well as making recommendations. However, the assessor should not, at this stage, indicate the final accreditation outcome to be recommended to the Board following the visit. There are three possible outcomes of the accreditation:

- The school provides an education in accordance with the principles of the Montessori approach and environment and merits accreditation by the Montessori Evaluation and Accreditation Board
- The school provides an education which broadly follows the principles of the Montessori approach and environment. This merits accreditation by the Montessori Evaluation and Accreditation Board, but consideration should be given to the following points for further development (on an actual report the recommendations would then be listed).

Working with three dimensional shapes



- The school does not yet provide an education which follows the principles of Montessori education to merit accreditation by the Montessori Evaluation and Accreditation Board.

Areas for development are:

Generally the full accreditation will be achieved by settings with exceptional practice, who may have one or two minor issues to address whilst continuing to work towards excellence in their practice.

The settings that have achieved accreditation which broadly meets the principles of the Montessori approach will be in the majority as, inevitably, there will be issues to be addressed. Improvement is at the core of all early years practice and at the heart of applying for accreditation. The recommendations made should guide Montessori practitioners towards improvements. I hope that these will be something the team has already identified and is aware of and aspires to address

The settings which do not meet the criteria are recommended to prepare an action plan which will address the areas for development and will be offered another visit within a year.

Within a couple of days of the visit, the assessor prepares a report based on the evidence gathered during their time at the setting. This report is submitted to the MEAB office and read twice; for consistency, its Montessori content and use of English. A third reader is available should it be required. It is then presented to the Report Monitoring Group which meets six times a year – roughly – once every half term. The task of this group is to ensure that the MEAB criteria are adhered to and that there is parity between the report and recommendations made. There is also a moderation framework in place which ensures that the work of individual assessors meets the MEAB criteria.



PHOTOS: LITTLE SWEETHEARTS MONTESSORI NURSERY

Developing cutting skills

The whole process from expressing interest in being accredited to receiving the certificate should take between six to twelve months.

Following the Report Monitoring Group meeting, the reports are sent back to the school to check factual accuracy, prior to the report being presented for validation to the Montessori Evaluation and Accreditation Board which meets three times per year usually once each term and makes the final decision about each accreditation. It is at this stage that the accreditation report becomes a public document.

Following the validation meeting, the list of accredited schools is published in Montessori International Magazine and on the Montessori website. The accredited school's name is identified by the MEAB logo in the school's database and the report becomes available on the MEAB website.



Terminology Cards - learning about the parts of a tree

The school also receives a hard copy of the report together with the Accreditation Certificate which is valid for three years. At the same time the setting is emailed the report, together with the MEAB logo and a sample of a press release. All schools are invited to an award ceremony where they will have the opportunity to celebrate their achievement with other settings and Montessori students.

The whole process from expressing interest in being accredited to receiving the certificate should take between six to twelve months.

The following key criteria are synonymous with good Montessori practice:

- Two and a half to three hour work cycle which gives children opportunities for spontaneous engagement with the favourable environment, prepared to meet their individual needs both inside and outside.
- Learning in a rich environment designed to support development of the whole child, where the child is the leader of learning.
- Being guided by well informed, sensitive practitioners who are ready to trust and respect the child's endeavours in self-construction whilst scaffolding their learning and working with parents and the local community for the good of their children. ■

Barbara Isaacs, Senior Accreditation Officer and Academic Director, MCI

Further Information

If you are considering MEAB accreditation, why not consult our website www.montessori.org.uk/accreditation. As well as articles relating to the MEAB accreditation you will also find the relevant forms you need to complete as part of the application process.

If you are anxious about the preparation for your MEAB accreditation you can attend a day's training session offered by MCI on Saturdays 28 November, 20 February or 24 April. For details see MCI Training Directory 2009/2010. If you have any further questions, please email Philip Davies on admin@meab.co.uk

It is Montessori Centre International's intention to use, wherever possible, only accredited schools for teaching practice from September 2009. Why not join the 65 already accredited schools and be part of a growing body of Montessorians committed to ongoing improvements in their practice.

Case study

Little Sweethearts Montessori Nursery

Ulker Eaton, Founder, Owner and Principal of Little Sweethearts describes why they decided to apply for accreditation and how they intend to use it.

For fifteen years our school has been committed to the highest standard of care and education. A well established school with ninety children on our register and a long waiting list, we had no commercial imperative for accreditation; our reputation has always been secured by word of mouth.



Ulker Eaton

We have been inspected by a variety of bodies over the past fifteen years, most recently in January 2009 and the results of all these visits have been highly satisfactory. So why did we decide to apply for the accreditation? Firstly there is strength in unity. Together we will have a stronger voice when discussing our practice with Local Authorities, Ofsted and any successor bodies. The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) draws much from the Montessori approach to education and the Montessori Schools Association cooperates with the Department for Children, Schools and Families to promote this understanding.

The accreditation would also provide reassurance that Little Sweethearts Montessori School provides the highest quality Montessori education and we will be subject to regular inspection to endorse our high standards.

Recognising the benefits of accreditation I decided to go ahead with the application. Thinking that I would shrink from the paperwork, I was surprised to find myself enjoying completing the forms. They were focused and I looked forward to being inspected by a fellow Montessorian whose views I would share and respect. Preparations for our accreditation visit followed.

We all were aware that our visitor would be a Montessorian, one of us. This thought comforted us greatly, and put us at our ease. Our assessor was highly observant, friendly and constructive. She expressed her delight at finding our children so happy and purposeful. We were delighted to receive such a positive report and are committed to addressing the constructive recommendations.

According to our assessment Montessori principals, goals, and philosophy are reflected comprehensively in our setting's literature and practice, such as the school prospectus, notice boards, newsletters, handouts, and progress evenings. One of our assessor's recommendations was that we provide more information for parents / carers regarding the EYFS. We shall follow this up in meetings and will distribute the 'Guide to the EYFS in Montessori Settings' to all parties.

The next task is to incorporate the MEAB accreditation into our paperwork and to proudly announce it to our parents.

We look forward to the ceremony in December where we can share our achievement with fellow Montessori schools and grow from strength to strength. It happens to coincide with our intention to open Little Sweethearts' sister school in North West London during the coming year. With the introduction of the MCI Degree Course in association with London Metropolitan University, Montessori Education is finally being recognised for its unique excellence and being embraced by the mainstream. We are delighted to be part of that process.



PHOTO: LITTLE SWEETHEARTS MONTESSORI NURSERY