

Why should we consider Montessori school accreditation?

In a series of articles, **Barbara Isaacs** will explain the process and benefits of your school becoming accredited. Each article will be accompanied by a contribution from a Montessori school who has already had experience of the accreditation step discussed in the article.

Without a doubt the first consideration for becoming accredited should be validation of your Montessori practice. You want to be accredited because you have committed to deliver Montessori education to children learning in your setting. What better celebration of your commitment than the recognition that your school has met the standards and criteria of a national body? By achieving the accreditation, your school will belong to a growing number of schools who have achieved the same recognition.

How can I use the accreditation to successfully market my school?

As an accredited school you will receive a plaque stating that your setting has been accredited by the Montessori Evaluation and Accreditation Board (MEAB) and that your accreditation is valid for three years. To receive your plaque you will be invited to attend an award-giving ceremony where you will have a photo opportunity for you and your staff to capture the moment when you receive your plaque. This year the presenter is Tana Ramsay. You will also be provided with a template for a press release should you wish to publicise the event in your local press.

Against the name of your school on the MSA database will be the MEAB logo, and on clicking on it all those



wishing to know further details can access the accreditation report for your setting. This will link to the MEAB website giving an outline of the criteria and requirements for accreditation.

“Receiving accreditation will communicate to your parents that you are committed to providing high quality, genuine Montessori education to their children.”

You will have the opportunity to use the MEAB logo on your publicity. This will be a constant reminder to all who are interested in your school or those associated with it that you have reached a certain level of professional conduct and practice, and that you are committed to quality improvements in your setting.

As you can see the marketing benefits offer you the opportunity to publicise your commitment to the Montessori approach. Receiving accreditation will communicate to your parents that you are committed to providing high quality, genuine Montessori education to their children.

What other benefits are there in my school becoming accredited?

There will also be benefits in relation to your preparation for Ofsted inspections as the Self Evaluation Form does refer to participation in quality assurance schemes. You will also have a stronger voice when discussing your practice with your Local Authority Consultant because the MEAB Accreditation is based on “The Guide to the EYFS in Montessori Settings” which is endorsed by the Department for Children, Schools and Families.

Little Learners



Copies of the document have been distributed to all Ofsted offices and local authorities; however, if you would like to have an extra copy for any official visitors to your setting, or for you parents to see in your library, please let the MEAB office know (admin@meab.co.uk) and we will post you a copy. You can also download a copy from the National Strategies or www.montessori.org.uk.

How will it benefit my practice?

The criteria are set against the key Montessori principle of following the child. As you prepare for your accreditation visit, the team should explore what this means to them and to your setting. This key principle of following the child should be reflected on, in relation to the activities available in the prepared environment, ensuring that you provide a favourable environment both inside and outside. The facilities for free flow of learning and continuous provision should be discussed in relation to the work-cycle, facilitating children's opportunities and time to engage in and complete cycles of activities.

Finally but not least we must consider the benefits for children, because after all it is their nursery or school that is being accredited. The children will benefit from the free flow of the work cycle which facilitates freedom to learn and engage in activities following their individual rhythms, sensitive periods and learning dispositions. They will be supported by practitioners who discuss and reflect on their practice regularly, practitioners who have opportunities for continued professional development and who are deeply committed to the children in their care.

Barbara Isaacs, Senior Accreditation Officer and Academic Director of MCI.

The children at Little Learners benefiting from the free flow of the work cycle

*In the next issue of **Montessori International** we will look at how to successfully prepare for MEAB accreditation.*

MCI are also running two Saturday seminars focusing on preparation for MEAB accreditation. They are planned for 17 January and 4 April 2009 (to find out more visit the MCI website www.montessori.uk.com)



Becoming accredited has had a profound effect on the mindset of the team. From left to right Sheila Longstaffe, Dawn Eade, Kate Rogers and Raju Surelia.

Little Learners in Solihull, Birmingham, was one of the first Montessori schools to achieve accreditation. Raju Surelia offers a brief insight into how this has benefited her practice.

We decided to get accredited primarily to have our practice evaluated in a professional manner. We wanted to be assessed by someone who understood the concepts of Montessori, unlike our experience with OFSTED inspections, which had generated a high level of frustration.

Little Learners opened fourteen years ago with a firm commitment to adhere to the Montessori ethos and principles. Although we are confident about our practice, our Local Authority has a distinct lack of understanding and has inundated us with contradictory advice that we must follow (we are the only Montessori setting in our LA). The opportunity to prove that we were doing it right by getting accredited was the second reason for us to go through the accreditation process.

Our inspection date was set for July 2008. With an aim and a vision in sight, it gave us the incentive we needed to revisit every single area of our curriculum. It could not have happened at a better time, as we were evaluating ways to implement the new EYFS as well.

Having the accreditation has raised our self esteem. We have gained an enormous amount of respect from our parents and, to some extent, the Local Authority. As a member of staff said to a parent yesterday – "we are not only good – we are the best". This comment showed what a profound effect being accredited has had on the mindset of the team. We feel Little Learners is now standing on the shoulders of giants – confident to go forward.

We will be inviting the mayor of Solihull to present us with the plaque, and also key members of our Local Authority Early Years Department. The local press will be invited to report on this presentation and our website will be using the accreditation logo to promote Little Learners, as will all our official paperwork, such as prospectus, letterheads, and compliment slips. We are also having a new school sign created with the accreditation logo. We feel that our newly accredited status together with the best marketing tool of all, word of mouth, will go along way to convince parents of the quality of the education we provide at our school.

Looking for worms (below)

