

# How should we prepare for Montessori School Accreditation?

**Barbara Isaacs** continues her series of articles by suggesting points to consider when examining your setting in preparation for accreditation.

If your school has decided that the MEAB accreditation is for you then you need to start preparation for the accreditation visit. The best way to start is to express your interest by emailing Philip Davies the MEAB administrator (admin@meab.co.uk) who will email you the school's accreditation handbook, which will outline the process.

There are four elements of your practice your team will need to reflect upon:

- How do we 'follow the child'?
- How does our environment meet the needs of children attending our school/nursery?
- What is the role of the adults in supporting children's learning and development?
- Does our Montessori practice meet the requirements of the EYF5?

Looking closely at each one of these four elements explore what you, as a setting, understand by **'following the child'**. Ask yourself questions during staff meetings and discuss what you actually do.

This should be a team effort; there is a need for dialogue amongst the practitioners to ensure all of you support the children effectively. Some of these questions should be:

- What do we understand by the work cycle?
- Do we give children enough opportunities for spontaneous engagement with all activities available to them – inside and outside?
- Do we give children choice to engage with activities on their own, with friends, in small groups? Do they have the choice not to take part? What is the role of the adults in supporting children who choose not to participate?

*The accreditation process was a positive challenge for the team at Rose House.*



PHOTO: ROSE HOUSE MONTESSORI

“When examining the environment and how it serves the individual needs of the children you will need to consider how well the environment is prepared.”

- Do the children have plenty of opportunities and support to follow their “inner teacher” and to develop self discipline?
- Is trust and respect evident in our practice? Remember Montessori advocated ‘belief in the child who is not yet there’.

When examining the **environment** and how it serves the individual needs of the children you will need to consider how well the environment is prepared. The attention to detail in maintaining the classroom is one way practitioners can demonstrate their commitment to children in Montessori settings on a daily basis. You will need to check and reflect on the organisation of learning in your setting and in the classrooms.

- Are all the areas of learning evident and well organised – inside and outside?

- Are the materials well maintained, complete and ready for use?
- Is the classroom inviting for the child - are the children happy, calm and engaged? What are they like when they come in, when they leave, during the day, when they are with their friends and the adults?
- Is the classroom calm enough to promote involvement and concentration?
- Is the classroom beautiful – does it give enough opportunities for “real experiences”, contact with nature, kindness and co-operation?
- Are we positive role models for the children - is there consistency and predictability in all we do?

You also need to reflect on your own attitudes to your Montessori practice, to the environment, to the children and your colleagues. Each adult in the nursery has an important role to play in ensuring that children's development is promoted and that children have opportunities for spontaneous learning. You need to ask yourself:

- Do we/I respect and trust the children in their need to follow their ‘inner guide/teacher’?
- How do we/I contribute to nurturing

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self-respect and self-discipline in my classroom?

- How do we/I contribute to the maintenance of the environment?
- Do we/I observe enough to be able to plan and meet the individual needs of the children?
- What is our/my role as a key person?
- How do we/I speak to the children – is my language reflecting respect for the child, am I consistent in my use of the ground rules, do I use positive language?
- Do we/I encourage dialogue with the children – are my questions open ended, do I listen to the children?
- Do we/I give children opportunities to share their ideas and do I support them appropriately (this relates directly to the current focus on “sustained shared thinking”)
- How do we/I communicate with parents? How do we build on what the child ‘brings with them from home’, how do we share children’s achievement with their parents, how do we engage parents in their children’s learning and development.
- How do we/I share our practice with the wider community?

Finally consult the “Guide to the EYFS in Montessori Settings”. If you have reflected and considered the questions above, you will realise that your good Montessori practice relates directly to the four principles identified as the key to good early years practice. The ‘Unique Child’, the ‘Enabling Environments’ which includes continuous provision and the ‘Supporting Relationships’ all of which support children’s development and learning.

When you have begun this process of reflection you should start completing the School Accreditation Form making sure you have the checklist of the documents required for the accreditation to hand.

Ofsted’s Self Evaluation Form will be another useful tool when preparing for the accreditation or it might be that your preparation for accreditation will feed into your annual review of the SEF.

## Case Study

# Rose House

**Ursula Nerre, head teacher at Rose House Montessori Pre-School in London demonstrates how her team prepared for accreditation.**

Being committed and passionate about Montessori Education, all members of our team decided that the accreditation process would be a positive challenge for us. Yet we knew that being confident about our practice would not be enough – our task would be to show its evidence in all aspects of our practice and most of all in the independence, confidence and happiness of our children. We compared this with the aspects of the ‘school form’ which asks us to reflect on the child’s independence, freedom and respect.

We considered the MEAB criteria for assessment and further acknowledged the links to the Early Years Foundation Stage and realised that part of our reflective process should include us ‘stopping, looking and thinking’ in relation to:

- The Unique Child (Independence, confidence, happiness, respect, freedom)
- The Enabling environment (our prepared, favourable environment, meeting the needs of the age range of children within it)
- Positive Relationships (interactions/presentations between children and adults. When to interact. When to stand back.)
- Learning and Developing (Montessori schemes of work; the materials and extensions).

This was the starting point of a structured look at different aspects of our practice and our ground rules. In the following weeks, team meetings were dedicated to different aspects of our practice. We used the MEAB schools evaluation form as our guide. Taking us through each stage and providing us with the starting questions. However, the important reflective aspects that had the biggest impact on us and our discussions were the moments when a teacher observed a child and shared her thoughts and ideas. This really got us thinking and moved us forward.

We looked at all our policies and procedures, our ground rules and daily routines to ensure that Montessori philosophy is evident in all of them whilst discussing the links with the four principles of the EYFS. We evaluated the way our children are free to move within our mixed age classroom (2 to 5 years). We discussed how we ensure that our three hour work cycle is never interrupted, albeit group activities such as dance or singing are offered.

Being in the fortunate position of having direct access from our classroom to a garden area with vegetable patches and flower beds, we observed our practice to ensure that our children have true freedom of movement. We also looked in detail at all our activities, considering whether they are accessible, beautiful, inviting and provide a cycle of activity, no matter if the child chooses to play inside or outside.

Evaluating our practice as a team was another important aspect of our preparation: how do we follow the child? Are we all committed to stand back when we are not needed, yet are we ready to encourage and scaffold learning when appropriate? Do we really give the children the time to explore and discover? Especially when using our Montessori materials? How do we record and share our observations within the team, with the child and with the child’s parents? How do we ensure we work in partnership with our parents and how do we share our Montessori practice with them?

Amidst all these preparations we knew that it is our children who would be the most convincing case for our practice.



PHOTOS: ROSE HOUSE MONTESSORI

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