

Montessori Evaluation and Accreditation Board

School Accreditation

This report is prepared following an accreditation visit made on behalf of the Montessori Evaluation and Accreditation Board. It considers how far the school follows the criteria set out in “The Guide to the EYFS in Montessori Settings”.

The report does not address the standards and quality issues which are the responsibility of the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) which reports separately. Also the report does not provide any assessment of financial aspects of the school.

Fountain Montessori Pre-School

St Margaret’s Parish Hall, Rectory Lane, Edgware, Middx HA8 7LG

Date of accreditation visit: 9 February 2010

The accreditation report assesses the Montessori practice offered to 2½ to 5 year olds in this setting

Description of the school:

Fountain Montessori Pre-School is situated in a church hall in Edgware. The hall has one large room (children aged from 2½ to 5 years), with access to a separate play area/sleeping area. There is also a storeroom, kitchen, office and WC’s for adults and children with changing facilities.

There is an enclosed and secure outdoor play area for the setting, which consists of a sand tray, a gazebo, a Wendy house, a climbing frame and a big shed for storage.

There are eight members of staff who attend regularly, of whom five have Montessori Diplomas and the other three members of staff hold relevant childcare qualifications. Most staff members have undertaken paediatric first aid training and some have undertaken training in food hygiene.

The setting offers a range of daily sessions plus an afterschool provision and a holiday club. The morning sessions are from 08.00 – 13.00, afternoon 13.00 – 18.00, and a full day 08.00 -15.00 or 08.00 – 18.00, during term times. There are currently 40 children on roll, who attend the setting on various days. Fountain Montessori School is registered for 39 children per session, of whom thirty are between the ages of 2½ and 5 at any one time. The school also offers provision for toddlers from 12 to 30 months, which is not part of this accreditation report.

Summary and conclusion.

Fountain Montessori School offers a genuine Montessori environment. The setting has a good range of Montessori materials which are suitable for the ages and ability of the children attending the different rooms. The Owner and Manager have a good understanding of the Montessori principles, goals and philosophy, this is reflected in the setting’s literature and practice. All staff members also have a good understanding and continue to refresh their knowledge and evaluate their practice in staff meetings and group discussions. The setting aims to help each child gain a

positive attitude towards learning and have prepared a favourable environment which stimulates the child's natural desire to learn and develop.

The setting offers the children a good foundation of learning and life skills, assisting them to fulfill their individual potential. The adults have a clear view of their role within the setting, are sensitive to each child's needs, ensure that they are challenged, nurtured and safe. These are in accordance with Montessori's principles. The school works closely with parents and carer's, valuing them as an important partner in providing for each child's care and development. The staff within the school are experienced, committed, enthusiastic and aware of each child's individual needs. The children are given a lot of opportunities for developing independence, exploration, life skills and have freedom within the inside and outside environment. The setting shows great importance to grace and courtesy which is encouraged through daily activities; for example the 2½ to 5 year olds are encouraged to respect each other's work space, to keep their environment clean and tidy, by drawing a chalk circle on the floor and sweeping paper within it. Children are also shown how to deal with difficult situations and are encouraged to use verbal communication to solve any issues. The setting places emphasis on the importance of making learning enjoyable, exciting and a hands-on experience.

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:

- To provide more information for parents/carers regarding the EYFS in relation to Montessori practice.
- To enhance children's understanding of print within the environment.

Philosophy:

Fountain Montessori Pre-School offers a prepared environment that constantly stimulates the child to learn and explore using their senses. Montessori's descriptions of the child, the family and the prepared environment are reflected in all aspects of the provision. The owner and the manager have a good understanding of Montessori principles, goals and philosophy, as shown in the setting's literature and working practice. Other staff members also have a good understanding and continue to refresh their knowledge in order to improve the prepared environment for the benefit of each individual child and families attending the setting. Home visits enable the key person to make links between the child, family and the school. The children have free access to all activities and are encouraged to explore with the help and guidance of the key person when and if required.

The views of parents are very important and crucial to the schools ongoing development and therefore the school organises parents' questionnaires, coffee mornings, parent/teacher meetings, newsletters and emails each term. The school has an open door policy where the parent can come and share any concerns, or share information regarding their child.

Learning and Development:

Fountain Montessori School operates from an open plan setting – the large hall is divided into classrooms which are partitioned by shelves. The Montessori materials are offered to the 2½ to 5 year olds throughout the work cycle according to their age and ability. Staff work together on planning the curriculum, including projects, group and individual activities. Both long term and short term plans are made by the owner, manager and the staff teams, catering for each individual child's needs and they are displayed for parents/carer's to view on the notice board. A well-structured programme allows the children to work at their own individual pace, repetition is encouraged, as is working alone, together, or with an adult.

The staff team make good use of the wide range of resources. They also allow the children to progress steadily within a programme that is guided by observation and assessment of the children's achievements and needs.

There is flexibility in the delivery of the curriculum in response to children's needs. This flexibility serves to support the adults in their commitment to improve the environment and ensure that it meets the needs of the children. The setting offers a good range of experiences for the children across the week and throughout the year. The full range of Montessori equipment is available daily, with the addition of regular art and craft provision, cookery, music and movement and outdoor exploring.

The staff have a good knowledge of the Early Years Foundation Stage and cross-reference the Montessori curriculum with the EYFS in the recording and assessment of children's learning. Individual children's records are often looked at for the team to ensure consistency and to share ideas. Emphasis is placed on children learning by doing and on the child leading with adult support.

Daily records are comprehensive and simple to use, giving an immediate picture of a child's current stage. A lot of time is spent on observations and record-keeping for the individual; these are updated daily by the key person and weekly as a whole group to ensure consistency and to share experiences and knowledge. Staff are confident and show good listening and questioning skills to which the children are allowed sufficient time to respond. The staff are flexible and spontaneous in delivery the curriculum in response to each child's needs.

Children are developing independence as they are given opportunities to choose activities freely to participate in and are allowed to explore their environments.

The quality of individual planning is good the quality of the short term and long term plans are good.

Prepared Environment: resources and materials

The Montessori materials are arranged around the classroom and promote the child's natural, self initiated impulse to become absorbed in a rich environment and to learn from it. There is a secure, stimulating environment where the child's physical, intellectual, social, emotional and language skills are allowed to progress and develop as they reach their individual potential. The school promotes independence and

provides opportunities for the child to focus on the joy of learning. The goals of the setting are clearly defined in writing, with written examples of how these are translated into good Montessori practice such as how children are encouraged to care for themselves, their friends and their environment.

The adults have a clear understanding of their role to nurture the needs of the children and guide them according to Montessori principles, enabling them to cater for each child's individual learning journey.

Fountain Montessori school offers a good range of equipment and resources to the children, the quantity of the materials provision is good. The school emphasizes self-discipline, respect for others and respect for the environment. "Practical Life" exercises also help to develop respect for the environment, with gentle reminders of the ground rules though out the sessions.

Staff take pride in maintaining a beautiful, ordered environment, which they adapt in response to the needs of the children attending, by using ongoing observations and assessments. The adults understand the importance of their role as directress of the Montessori environment and facilitators in linking children with the environment to develop their skills. The setting provides a variety of experiences within different areas of the classroom (e.g. ICT area, art and craft area, etc.).

The materials are set out around the classroom according to areas of the Montessori curriculum. They are systematically arranged and are accessible to all the children.

Fountain Montessori School offers a full range of equipment to the children, the quantity of the materials provision is good. Children would benefit from more labeling within the classroom.

Outdoor provision extends the Practical Life, Sensorial, Cultural and Creative activities which are available indoors. The 2½ to 5 year old children have opportunities for physical development by using a range or equipment in the outside area at a set times in the winter months However if a child would like to go into the outdoors area they can ask a teacher, and free flow is on offered during the rest of the year.

The children's pegs have pictures of each child as well as their names and are child-sized, they use the area near their pegs to change their shoes. Children are discouraged from misuse of the materials (although exploration is encouraged), they are encouraged not to interrupt others, respect each other's work space and to negotiate space with their peers.

Montessori practice: independence

Staff at Fountain Montessori Pre-School understands the importance of facilitating children's independence. From the time that they start at the setting the children are shown how to care for themselves, others and the environment by using grace and courtesy activities. Children are given the time that they need to achieve tasks without adult intervention and staff make changes in the environment through observation and assessments, to enhance the opportunities for the individual child to achieve independence. Activities that the school encourages children to do independently are to pour their own drinks, chopping and peeling their own fruit for a snack, or finding

their own name tags from their draws to label their mark making.

The 2½ to 5 year old children are given freedom of choice and are well supported in making decisions for themselves throughout the three hour work cycle. Children can choose what they want to do inside, and with whom they wish to work during the morning work cycle, either by themselves, in pairs, in a small group, larger group, or with a teacher.

The promotion of children's independence beyond the setting is achieved through written communications such as parents' prospectus, handouts, and verbal contact with parents/carers. Parents chats are offered yearly, and the schools also organizes regular coffee mornings for the parents. Parents are told how much their children are achieving by themselves at the setting and suggestions are offered as to how to extend their independence at home and the benefits of doing so. The termly newsletter offers many suggestion regarding the Montessori approach and children's independence at home.

The adults acknowledge the importance of their status as positive role models, by promoting the children's self help skills, the power of concentration, self discipline and diligence, self worth, independence, courtesy, kindness and respect for others. They demonstrate respect for others in their interaction with each other, with the children and with any visitors. The setting has a good policy on equality and diversity and this is reflected in its practice, for example in offering the children opportunities to explore festivals from different cultures, etc. Fountain Montessori School aims to help children discover the joy of learning through hands-on experiences and exploration within a secure environment. The children show high levels of curiosity, concentration and confidence. They are aided in learning life skills and are helped to prepare themselves for their future.

Montessori practice: classroom management:

The classrooms are well organised and managed for the benefit of the children attending. A full Montessori work cycle is in place during the morning and the afternoon sessions. The afternoon session starts after the children have had their lunch, and mirrors the morning session, where children have access to all the materials and areas in the classroom. During the time at the setting the children are shown how to use the various activities and cared for by their key person as well as the other teachers within the setting, therefore enabling each child to build a good relationship with a variety of adults. The children are confident, happy and polite and seem settled into the daily routine of the setting.

The owner and manager have overall responsibility for health and safety and risk assessments. All the adults are responsible for helping to maintain an orderly and safe environment. Risk assessments are also done before any outings take place. Policies and procedures are clear and easy to understand and support safe working practices. Record keeping, assessments and observation practices are well-established and effective, all the staff show a good understanding of the process.

The setting is committed to the process of continual self-evaluation and improvement,

through staff meetings and Self Evaluation Forms. There is a great deal of emphasis given to adapting the activities to the individual needs of the child and observations are carried out to ascertain how a child is consolidating their learning, next steps and how presentations can be tailored to suit the individual. If a child is having difficulty choosing independently, they may be guided to choose activities with a teacher or their friends or they may be redirected to certain parts of the classroom. The adults have a clear view that their role is to nurture the needs of the children and guide them according to Montessori principles, enabling them to cater for each child's individual learning journey.

Montessori Practice: links with parents, including reports and records:

The setting is well organised, with excellent adult routines and good links with parents/carers. Parents are seen as partners in their children's learning and development and are included in the setting's daily routine. Montessori practice is explained to parents when their child is going to start the school, also on the organised coffee mornings. The school arranges home visit, giving all evolved the opportunity to meet their key person and share information with the parents, and parents have the opportunity to share information in their home environment. The parents would benefit from having more information about the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) and how it meets the Montessori practice in the setting, as this would further expand their knowledge and understanding, providing more opportunities for the child and the parents to develop their child's individual learning journey. The setting has long term planning, short term planning is done weekly, providing specific activities available to all the children (following the EYFS). Individual children's planning is done by the child's key person, after discussion with the other teachers within the school and based on the child's weekly observations. Individual planning is available throughout each day, importance is placed on the children learning by support and guidance from the each other, the teachers, their peers and the prepared environment.

Staffing:

The staffing structure is well organised, with clearly defined and documented roles. All staff members are highly dedicated and work with care and diligence to achieve the setting's aims and to contribute to an effective team. The process of staff induction is thorough and is reviewed once induction has been completed. Training is planned for the year and shows continuing professional development. The setting also has regular staff meetings, which are clearly documented. The staff attend local council training courses regularly and MCI training courses. The needs of the children with learning difficulties, English as an additional language and additional needs/disabilities, are recognised and are met sensitively by the setting. Staff work with the early year's special educational needs teams, other professionals and parents/carers. The children are offered appropriate levels of independence and are re-directed by the adults when

they need support. In keeping with good Montessori practice a great deal of emphasis is given to adapting the activities to the individual needs of the child and observations are carried out to ascertain every child is consolidating their learning.

Name of Assessor
Hatice D'jela

Date of report
09/02/2010