

# **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.

### **Harlequin Montessori Nursery**

School Road, Billericay, Essex, CM12 9LH

Date of accreditation visit: 10 March 2010

The accreditation report assesses the Montessori practice offered to 2 to 5 year olds in this setting

#### **Description of the school:**

Harlequin Montessori Nursery is the larger of two nurseries owner by the Proprietor. It was established 18 years ago and is set in a single-storey building in the grounds of a secondary school in the centre of Billericay.

The nursery is accessed through a small front garden leading to a short corridor. The main room is open plan with nursery and classroom areas. There is a kitchen, store room, small office and lavatories and direct access to the back garden. The back garden is mainly tarmac and is used daily for a range of activities.

The nursery is open from 8.30 a.m. until 4.15 p.m. Monday to Friday. It is registered for 37 children from 2 to 8 years. At present there are 70 children on roll and 37 attend in the morning and 14 to 20 attend in the afternoon. There is a team of 14 staff including an administrator and domestic help.

#### **Summary and conclusion.**

Harlequin Montessori Nursery is a happy and busy environment where children are enthusiastic and eager to learn and show good levels of concentration. The Montessori philosophy is evident throughout the school with regard to children’s freedom, trust and respect and is reflected in the nursery’s policies and practices. The curriculum is broad and follows the Montessori approach through the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). There is a good and imaginative range of materials and resources inside and outside, and children’s learning and progress is monitored through written observations and reports. Parents feel well informed about their children’s learning and liaison with them is open and friendly. The staff work really well as a team and are committed to Montessori practice by continued professional development and regular meetings.

***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 :***

- Plan for gradual replacement of materials for sensorial activity.
- Ensure that their record keeping system is streamlined to incorporate both the EYFS and Montessori areas of learning.
- Ensure that staff meetings are documented with actions highlighted and that these are available to all the staff to ensure that best practice is being followed and evaluated.

**Philosophy:**

The Montessori philosophy is evident throughout the school and adhered to by all members of staff. All the staff have a good understanding of Montessori philosophy and practice. This is demonstrated by the way they talk to children and encourage thought and self-initiated learning through open questions and 'show and tell' sessions. The children are encouraged to work independently or in small groups and are supported by the staff to concentrate on their chosen activity for long periods of time.

The nursery provides a warm and caring environment with the staff committed to Montessori practice as written in the mission statement. The children are happy, enthusiastic and relaxed and move about the room purposefully. They are aware of what is expected of them however further consideration should be given to how a calm and harmonious learning environment is promoted by the setting.

**Learning and Development:**

All the staff have a genuine understanding of child development and meet each morning to discuss the day ahead and any strategies required for individual children. Both Montessori and EYFS areas of learning are referred to and considered in comprehensive weekly and termly plans.

The areas of learning meet the children's developmental needs and are thoughtfully arranged and labeled with photographs. Practical life, art and craft, books, heuristic and snack areas are in the nursery end of the class. Language and literacy, information technology, mathematics, nature table, music, cultural, books and sensorial are organized in the remainder of the room.

The Montessori work cycle is evident and children are free to work inside and outside for about three hours. Children are confident in independent self skills when choosing to work outside and are familiar with returning materials to their correct place both inside and outside. Younger children watch a large moveable alphabet activity with interest and then drift away when their curiosity is fulfilled.

Each member of staff is responsible for an area of the class and has six to eight key children. Daily observations are recorded under the six areas of learning and transferred into each

child's file. These are assessed and evaluated to monitor learning and progress and plan for the next stage in development.

### **Prepared Environment: Resources and Materials**

The nursery has a good and appropriate range of materials and resources which are replaced as each area coordinator feels there is a need.

Practical Life exercises and books are sparsely arranged on low open shelves facilitating the younger children's choice. Other materials are displayed in an imaginative and attractive way on a range of shelving, on tables, and in baskets on the floor. Furniture is child-sized and all materials are easily accessible to children. There is ample floor space in each area of learning for individual work mats or for group work. Materials are interesting, clean, complete and of good quality although some Sensorial Materials may need replacing. The wall displays are fresh, simple and stimulating and enhance the uncluttered feel of the classroom.

There is a fish tank on the nursery side of the class and a gerbil cage in the main class. Both these are supported with appropriate and interesting resources.

The creative area is well resourced encouraging independent skills as children use magnets to stick paper to the easel and pegs to hang their work to dry. There is a good range of supplementary art and craft materials and a quiet writing area where children can copy a Union Jack or practice letters.

Outside there is a good range of resources which are appropriate for gross and fine and motor skills. Two climbing frames are well used and enthusiastic water painting is popular. Heuristic play materials are used to make a café and a member of staff supported a child make a 'tree' using clay and branches. Staff work closely as a team to follow the children inside or outside to ensure the correct ratios are maintained.

### **Montessori practice: Independence, Independence at Home, Freedom, Respect:**

All the staff value the importance of trusting children to be independent from the time they enter the nursery. Children hang their own coats and select exercises with confidence. They choose a selection of fruit for snack and wash their cups. They have the freedom throughout the morning to work independently, join a 'show and tell' circle, a large singing circle, or play outside.

Younger children are encouraged to work in the nursery area but free to join older children if they choose. The staff are courteous and one member welcomes a younger child to the circle by using his/her name and encouraging children to make a space for him. Many teachers work with children on the floor giving eye contact and encouraging positive attitudes by listening attentively and showing patience.

Parents feel welcomed by the nursery and are aware of the open door policy and are confident to approach any member of the staff. Parents feel they have some understanding of Montessori philosophy and EYFS through the initial verbal introduction, the induction folder,

the information on the notice board and Open Evenings. They could be given further information on how to introduce Montessori exercises at home. Parents are informed about their child's learning through verbal and written observations and are welcome to contribute to these.

### **Montessori practice: Classroom Management**

Learning in the nursery is encouraged through well-managed plans and a strong commitment to Montessori practice by offering an up to three hour work cycle. The staff have clear written roles and responsibilities and work as part of a strong team to adjust ratios in each area and outside. There is a key worker system in place and the staff work with all children within all areas and are coordinators for topics such as Language and Literacy, Raising Boys Achievements and Outside Play.

The staff are adept at knowing the level of intervention required during large group activities and individual exercises. They are clear in their Montessori practice especially regarding how to speak to children. There is a good balance of individual and teacher-led activities and children who do not choose to join group exercises are mostly aware of what is expected of them.

### **Montessori Practice: Links with Parents, Reports and Records**

The staff are very aware of what is happening in the nursery. They know the children well and ensure they are busy and safe. They keep observations, records and photographs for each child and transfer them into individual folders. They could streamline their record keeping, thus incorporating both the EYFS and Montessori areas of learning.

The nursery works hard to build strong links with parents. The induction booklet is committed to Montessori Philosophy and there are frequent Open Evenings when parents can view the records and there is a newsletter each term. The nursery has a good web site with a page to encourage their involvement with topics etc., and with suggestions for activities, stories, songs and rhymes.

The nursery has a 'Monty Bear' for families to take home and write about and there is a board for photographs of past pupils. Parents feel well informed about their child's progress through informal talks with the staff and written observations. One mentioned she had heard about Montessori training courses.

### **Staffing:**

The staff are committed to the nursery and work well as part of a strong team. They are positive and knowledgeable about Montessori principles and practice yet some are tentative to encourage the children to be calm and move carefully within the environment. Most have at least a Foundation Certificate in Montessori (Level 2) and three have an International Diploma with Teaching Practice. All the staff have a firm understanding of child development and learning. Staff photographs, names and areas of responsibilities are pinned on the notice board

in the corridor.

In-service training for new and present staff is provided by visiting Montessori professionals and County Training. There is a written induction procedure for new staff and students and clear job descriptions which are committed to Montessori and EYFS principles. The first day of each term is a non pupil day for planning, policy reviews, ongoing professional development and any areas of concern are discussed. There are written agendas for staff meetings; however actions could be more clearly monitored if minutes were taken and made available to all practitioners.

It is evident that the staff use their experience, ongoing training and knowledge of Montessori practice very effectively to 'follow the lead' of the child.

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Name of Assessor: Carolyn McNeill

Date of report: 10/03/10