

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.

Little Montessorians Pre-School

The Scout Hut, Roding Lane South, Ilford, Essex IG4 5PD

Visited on 16 June 2009

Description of the school:

Little Montessorians Pre-School was taken over by the present owner in 2006. The nursery operates from a large scout hut and is situated, amidst trees and fields, at the entrance to the Roding Valley Park in Redbridge. Registered for 20 children, the setting is open 9.15 to 12.15 Monday and Friday and 9.15 to 15.15 Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday.

There are currently 31 children on the roll from two to five years old. The classroom is located in a bright spacious hall and there is a cloakroom and toilets for the children and a separate toilet for staff, as well as a kitchen. Outside, there is a fenced grassed play area for the children. The owner has a Montessori Diploma and she is assisted by two Montessori students and two appropriately qualified assistants.

Summary and conclusion.

Little Montessorians Pre-School is very well organised with strong leadership and a supportive staff team. Staffs' in-depth knowledge of each child gained through observation and keen belief in the Montessori approach informs the planning and ensures that each child is progressing well at his or her own pace. The children arrive happily and quickly become engaged in the activities they choose, showing independence and self confidence.

Inside there is a good, broad range of activities, but the outside area needs development. Parents and carers are very supportive of the group and well-informed about their child's progress. There is a good interchange of information about their child's activities and interests each week. Circle time needs reviewing to enable the children to keep their independence and freedom of choice to select activities that are suitable for their age and stage.

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

- Develop the outdoor environment to better reflect the excellent indoor provision for learning and development.
- The work cycle should be extended by including a more informal circle time which children could choose to attend or not.
- To develop a range of creative activities

Philosophy:

Very good documentation with photographs for parents clearly explains how the Montessori philosophy is implemented in the nursery. Throughout the work cycle, there is clear evidence that the staff have a good understanding of the Montessori principles, as they allow the children complete freedom to choose from a wide range of materials, carefully observing and noting progress and next steps. The staff know their key children well and are sensitive to their individual needs.

One child was using both the pink tower and the broad stair together and a member of staff was trying to show him how to alternate them, but the child was too enthusiastic to watch and started to build in his own way, whereupon the staff member stood back and allowed him to take over, following his own impulse. During the work cycle there is a real Montessori atmosphere in the classroom with children purposefully engaged in activities, concentrating well, tidying up and putting away, and yet with a happy hubbub and bustle of activity.

Circle time needs reviewing as during this period the teacher becomes dominant and the children lose their freedom of choice as they are obliged to participate. Discussing the 'letter of the week' with the whole group is confusing as the children are at different stages of development.

Learning and Development:

The planning and assessment is well managed. The curriculum is mainly based on progression through the use of the Montessori materials, but incorporating the early learning goals. The written planning is concerned with the topic plans but the majority of the emphasis in the classroom during the work cycle is for the children to choose freely from the very good range of activities, in which some of the topic ideas are included. All the staff work with the children in one classroom and staff observe constantly adding notes to the children's records in their role as key workers, setting appropriate next steps.

There are also appropriate opportunities for the children to choose an art activity, role play or dressing up, although there is room for improvement in the planning of the garden area.

The records of children's attainment and progress are well maintained, up to date and thorough. Records are very detailed and parents are involved in contributing either through the excellent 'blue' books, which are sent home each week with a brief summary of the child's week and an invitation for parents' comments, through special meetings or on a day-to-day basis.

Many of the children attending have English as a second language and the staff speak several languages between them so they are able to provide effective support for all the children. Considerable thought is given to the choice of books in the book corner to reflect the languages spoken, including a delightful home-made book about children in the nursery in three languages.

Prepared Environment: resources and materials

Despite the poor condition of the building and having to put away all the resources almost every day, the staff manage to provide a warm and welcoming environment, with displays on the walls and many shelves set out beautifully with inviting materials. Unfortunately it is not easy to access the outside play area directly, so the children do not have free access to it.

There is a very good selection of Montessori activities in all areas inside. On the practical life shelves a fruit and vegetable sink and float activity, as well as a miniature fruit sorting activity, designed to highlight the subject of the topic, proved very popular. A large treasure basket filled with metal objects added extra interest to a good range of sensorial materials and provided good opportunities for extension of children's language skills and vocabulary. The language and maths sections also provided a good selection of Montessori activities and some cut-out coloured cardboard flowers on lollipop sticks made an excellent sorting activity into flowerpots. Most sections of the prepared environment had handmade activities, which enhance the children's choice. There is a very good cultural section with life of a banana pictures which children were able to place in order from flower to market. In addition, there are dressing-up clothes, a home corner and creative area. The children very much enjoyed a sticking activity, although they would have had a better opportunity to develop artistically if they were free to design their own patterns rather than using pre-prepared outlines.

Outside, the equipment is mainly plastic and does not match the strong Montessori approach that is evident in the planning and quality of the inside activities.

Montessori practice: *independence, independence at home, freedom, respect.*

Both during the work cycle and outside play, the children are quite free to choose their own activities independently. The children took full advantage of this, choosing from the wide selection of activities and often concentrating for long periods of time totally engrossed. Children used some of the materials in a unique way. For example two children using the red rods placed one rod across another, then took off their shoes and placed them on the top rod either side of the bottom rod carefully adjusting them until they balanced.

The children decide independently when to have a snack, helping themselves to food and a drink and washing up their cup and plate afterwards. Encouraging the children to prepare their own snack, and revising the formal, teacher-led circle time would further enhance opportunities for independence. Ringing the bell at the end of the work cycle interrupted some children who were absorbed in their activities.

All the parents interviewed felt very well-informed about how to help their children at home, initially through the excellent information provided by the nursery when their children start, but also through continuing suggestions for activities at home in the newsletters and the excellent two-way dialogue in the 'blue' books.

There is clear evidence that the children show respect for staff, each other and the environment. Staff shake hands with the children on arrival, listen to what they have to say and lead by example. The children work happily together, carefully avoid treading on each others mats, and put away their work keeping their environment tidy.

Montessori practice: classroom management

In both sessions the work cycle lasted two and a quarter hours followed by outside play and then circle time, but the work cycle should be extended by revising and including the circle time. The work cycle itself worked extremely well with the children enjoying their independence and the staff confident and efficient at providing support where necessary. The children were without exception extremely busy choosing activities, showing excellent concentration and completing the cycle of activity.

All the children are vertically grouped in the same room, but topic planning allows for differentiation and the key person follow each child's progress carefully so that they progress as and when they are ready. In fact some of the children were reading quite fluently from phonetic reading books and others were doing simple sums or developing their writing skills to a high standard.

Montessori Practice: links with parents, including reports and records

The building is safe for the children and the staff take great care to ensure that the door is kept locked at all times. The classroom is clean and well maintained, as are the activities and apparatus. All the adults' routines and responsibilities are very well-organised, with staff forming a close-knit team with strong leadership. Key persons make very effective use of observations to plan for the children's 'next steps'. The record keeping system is comprehensive and up to date.

There is excellent liaison with parents through day-to-day feedback, individual meetings, the reporting in the 'blue' book and social activities, such as outings and sports day. The parents are very supportive and have a very high regard for the nursery. Evaluation sheets show glowing feedback and one parent sought me out to feed back her high regard of the nursery.

The children bring their own packed lunches, but there is an effective allergies policy. An allergies chart is consulted at snack time and when children have a cooking activity.

Staffing:

New staff attend an appropriate induction procedure, which fully covers the Child Protection procedure and staff are well-led by a strong leader. Several of the staff are long-serving and they form a very strong team working closely together. Although only the owner is currently Montessori qualified, the two students are close to completing their Montessori training, so there is a very good understanding of the Montessori principles and philosophy amongst the majority of the staff. This is evident in their practice during the work cycle. They have also attended several other inset courses relating to EYFS, First Aid, etc.

The proprietor takes full responsibility for all aspects of running the nursery, including staff training and appraisal. There is clear evidence of the staff structure and the staff are well organized and clear about their roles and responsibilities.

The owner has a strong commitment to the Montessori philosophy and this is mirrored enthusiastically by her staff team.

Name of Assessor: Claire Harris

Date of report: 19 June 2009