

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 Sweethearts Montessori School

St Saviour's Church Hall, Warwick Avenue, London W9 2PT

Visited on 29 June 2009

Description of the school:

Little Sweethearts Montessori School is situated in the Church Hall in the lower ground floor of a Church within Little Venice, in the London Borough of Westminster. The Hall has one large room, which is divided into six classroom areas, with a kitchen, toilet facilities for adults and children with two baby changing units, office and staff room. Originally designed as a theatre there have been extensive building works and refurbishment to create the school. There is a lift available at the rear of the building if required. There is no outdoor play area for the setting however the school has an arrangement with a local school five minutes away for the provision of a private outdoor play space each day between 11.15 a.m. to 11.45 a.m. Children are also taken out on a regular basis to nearby parks.

There are fifteen members of staff, of whom six have Montessori Diplomas and the other nine members of staff hold relevant childcare qualifications or have several years' experience. Most staff members have undertaken paediatric first aid training and some have undertaken training in food hygiene.

The setting offers three different sessions every day, morning 08.55 a.m. to 12 noon, afternoon 1.15 p.m. to 3.45 p.m. and a full day 08.55 a.m. to 3.30 p.m. during term time.

There are currently 47 children who attend and the setting is registered for 47 children per session.

Summary and conclusion.

Little Sweethearts Montessori School offers an authentic Montessori environment. Little Sweethearts Montessori School has a good range of Montessori materials which are suitable for the ages and ability of the children in the different rooms, who attend the setting. The Principal and Deputy have a good understanding of 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 weekly staff meetings and weekly training sessions. The setting aims to help each child gain a positive attitude towards learning and to offer them a good foundation and life skills, thereby assisting them to fulfil their potential, their natural enthusiasm for "learning".

The setting offers the children a good foundation of learning and life skills, assisting them to fulfil their full individual potential. The adults have a clear view of their role within the setting; to be sensitive to each child's needs; to ensure that the children are challenged, nurtured and safe. These are in accordance with Montessori principles.

The school works closely with parents and carers, valuing them as important partners in providing for each child's care and development. The staff are experienced, committed, spontaneous and very aware of each child's individual needs within the setting.

The children are given many opportunities to develop independence and explore life skills. They are given freedom to choose in a prepared environment.

The setting gives great importance to the ground rules (i.e. grace and courtesy), which are encouraged through daily activities.

Children are also shown how to deal with difficult situations and are encouraged to use verbal communication to solve any issues. The school's planning is all relevant and all members of the staff team contribute. Individual children's profile folders are updated daily and reviewed weekly.

The setting places emphasis on the importance of making learning an enjoyable, exciting and challenging experience which provides a good foundation to the child for many "happy learning" years ahead.

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
- To complete and retain appraisal forms
- Consider appointment of more staff with full Montessori qualification

Philosophy:

The Principal and Deputy have a very good understanding of the Montessori philosophy and are committed to provide a homely and authentic Montessori environment. This commitment is evident throughout the setting's day to day preparations and is reflected in the staff practice. All staff members are highly dedicated and work with love and diligence to achieve the setting's aims and maintain the prepared environment for the benefit of each child attending.

Comprehensive explanation of Montessori philosophy and principles are given throughout the setting's literature i.e. on notice boards. All staff members attend weekly staff meetings and weekly training sessions which allow them to review and evaluate their own practice and the prepared environment to provide for each child's individual needs. The setting places emphasis on the importance of making learning an enjoyable, exciting and challenging experience which provides a good foundation to the child for many "happy learning" years ahead. Parents are considered important partners in providing for the individual child's welfare, and the school values the exchange of views and information.

Learning and Development:

Little Sweethearts Montessori School operates from open plan setting. The large hall is divided into six classrooms the children are aged between 2 years to 5 years. The classrooms are divided by shelves on which the Montessori materials are arranged and offered to the children throughout the work cycle according to their age and ability. The children are encouraged to respect each other and share their experiences for example, an older child showing a younger child how to roll the mat. The children are actively encouraged to share their knowledge and understanding with each other. Little Sweethearts' staff work together in planning the curriculum, including termly themes, projects, group and individual activities. Long and short term plans are drawn up by the team. Long, medium and short term plans are drawn up as a team and displayed for parents and carers. The setting continuously provides a wide range of learning experiences. The full range of Montessori equipment is available, with the addition of daily art and craft activities, cookery, weekly French lessons, weekly ICT lessons, gym, ballet, music, and dance and drama groups. Outdoor activities include physical games such as catching and throwing, hula hoop games, riding bicycles, going on nature walks etc. The staff show a secure knowledge of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) and cross-reference the Montessori curriculum with the EYFS in the recording and assessment of children's learning. Individual children's records are looked at and updated daily by the key person and weekly as a whole group to ensure consistency and to share experiences and knowledge.

Daily observations are used to set children practical targets which are achievable by the child. Staff are confident and show good listening and questioning skills. Children are always allowed sufficient time to respond. The staff are very flexible and spontaneous in delivering the curriculum that meets each child's needs.

Children develop independence as they are given opportunities to choose activities freely and are allowed to explore their environment.

Prepared Environment: resources and materials

Little Sweethearts Montessori school is a large setting with a good range of equipment and resources. The setting uses a daily check system to ensure that the environment and materials are maintained to a high standard, attractive and are ordered in relation to the areas of learning. It is a spacious environment and the children are shown how to look after it, they are all encouraged to follow the ground rules. Little Sweethearts Montessori School uses its ground rules throughout the setting to define several aspects of the school setting. They are a superb means of children learning self-discipline, self-respect, respect for others and respect for the environment. Practical Life exercises also help to develop respect for the environment. Staff take pride in maintaining a beautiful orderly environment, which they adapt in response to the needs of the children, using ongoing observation and assessment. It is a very good environment and the children are shown how to look after it by using the ground rules. The adults understand the importance of their role as Montessori Directresses. They provide children with learning opportunities in a prepared environment enabling them to develop their skills.

The teachers provide the children with a wide range of learning opportunities. They are very aware of the children's interests, level of development and the need for spontaneous play. They are very aware of stepping back and observing the children until they are invited to participate. The staff team plan a balanced curriculum for the children attending the setting, by observing each child daily and setting achievable targets. The materials are set out around the classrooms according to areas of the Montessori curriculum. They are methodically arranged

from simple to complex and are accessible to all the children. The children's pegs have pictures of each child as well as their names and are child-sized. They also have an area for change and storage of shoes under their pegs. Children are not allowed to misuse the materials (although exploration is encouraged), they are encouraged not to interrupt others and to respect each other's work space or negotiate space with their peers. They are asked to await their turn if an activity that they want to use is already taken. They are encouraged by the teacher, in accordance with the ground rules to show patience and courtesy to their peers. The children have opportunities for physical development by using large physical materials in the outside area at a set time in the morning sessions.

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

Staff at Little Sweethearts Montessori school understand the importance of facilitating children's independence. From the time that they start at the setting they are shown how to care for themselves, others, and the environment. This is achieved through one to one and group presentations such as how to pour their own drinks independently, or finding their own work books from the shelf. Children are given ample time to complete their task without adult intervention. They are given a lot of freedom of choice and are well supported in problem solving and making choices for themselves throughout the work cycle. During the work cycle children are encouraged to choose with whom they wish to work either by themselves, in pairs, in a small group, larger group, with a teacher.

Montessori practice is explained to parents of children new to the setting. The school has an excellent 'settling in' procedure for new children and their parents who start 30 minutes before the nursery opens. They are given the opportunity to explore the environment, get to know their key person and share information with the parents. Parents have the opportunity to share information in a relaxed environment. The literature provided is detailed and explains the importance of the Montessori method and the importance of independence both in school and at home. All parents also receive a termly newsletter with relevant information. Parents are given feedback on a daily basis about their child's day and twice a year formal parent-teacher meetings are arranged, although the school also operates an open-door policy. The Montessori environment and the positive influence of role models promote the children's development of self help skills, the power of concentration, self discipline and diligence, self worth and independence, courtesy, kindness and respect for others. The teachers set an excellent example for the children, increasing their self-esteem through such Montessori principles as knowing that we have to respect ourselves before we can respect others, and creating awareness by regular, consistent and firm reminders. The second part of the setting's Ground Rules consists of "courtesy" rules which are an excellent means of promoting respect for others.

The adults acknowledge the importance of their status as positive role models; they demonstrate respect for others with their interaction with each other, with the children, with parents and carers and with all visitors. The setting has a good policy on equality and diversity and this is reflected in its practice, for example in offering the children a global perspective on respect for others through celebrating festivals, inviting family members to celebrate with the school and projects on other cultures and continents.

Montessori practice: classroom management

The classroom is 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 at 1.15 p.m. and, as during the morning session, children have access to all the materials and areas in the classroom. There are opportunities for different activities such as French lessons, cooking, art and crafts, ballet, gym, music, drama and dance as optional clubs. During their time at the setting the children are presented with materials and cared for by their key person as well as the other teachers. The school is open plan and so the children are able to see and work with other teachers in different classroom areas, thereby enabling each child to build a good relationship with a variety of teachers. The children are confident, happy and polite and seemed settled into the daily routine of the setting.

The Principal and Deputy manager have overall responsibility for health and safety. All teachers undertake daily 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 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 continuous self-evaluation and improvement, through weekly discussion. The staff team offer appropriate levels of independence to children who are redirected by the adults when they need support. 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 his/her learning, next steps and how presentations can be tailored to suit the individual. If a child is having difficulty choosing independently, he/she may be guided to choose from a more restricted selection.

Montessori Practice: links with parents, including reports and records

The setting is very well organised, with excellent adult routines and good links with parents and carers. They are seen as partners in their children's learning and development and are included into the setting's daily routine. Montessori practice is explained to parents of children new to the setting. They are given the opportunity to explore the environment, get to know their key person and share information with the parents. Parents have the opportunity to share information in a relaxed environment. The setting has long term planning which details future events and projects term by term a year in advance. 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 classroom, and based on the teacher's weekly observations of the child. The children are set targets based on the key person's observations of their work and progress. Individual planning is available in the classroom during each session. Importance is placed on the children learning by support and guidance from their peers, teachers, and the prepared environment.

Staffing:

The staffing structure is well organised, with clearly defined roles and it is documented. All staff members are highly dedicated and work with love and diligence to achieve the setting's aims. They create an effective team. The process of staff induction is thorough and is reviewed

throughout and upon completion. Inset days are planned for the year and show continuing professional development. The setting also has weekly staff meetings and weekly training sessions. External training is arranged annually and staff regularly attend local authority training courses as well. 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 and carers to ensure that children's individual needs are met successfully. The children are offered appropriate levels of independence and are redirected by the adults when they need support. 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 children consolidate 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 from a more restricted selection.

Name of Assessor
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