

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 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.

Living Spring Montessori School

St Michael's Church Annex, St Michael's Road, Cricklewood, London NW2 6XG

Visited on 24 February 2009

Description of the school:

Living Spring Montessori is situated in a church hall within the London Borough of Brent. The school has three bright and spacious rooms. Within the setting there is also a kitchen, toilet facilities, a stock room, and a large reception area. There is a small, secure garden to which the children have access during each session at set times. The setting also makes good use of the community, with visits to the local park, shops, florist and library. The school offers full day care provision, with a range of sessions available between 8 a.m. and 6 p.m. five days per week, throughout the year. There are currently 85 children attending; the setting is registered for 72 children

There are eighteen members of staff who attend regularly, of whom sixteen have Montessori Diplomas and eight hold a Degree in Psychology. All staff members have undertaken paediatric first aid training and some have undertaken training in food hygiene.

Summary and conclusion.

Living Spring Montessori School offers a genuine Montessori environment. Montessori's descriptions of the child, the family and the prepared environment are reflected in aspects of the provision. Living Spring 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. Both the owner and manager 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 and monthly staff meetings. The setting aims to help each child gain opportunities for exploration, discovery, and to become independent both at school and at home, allowing the children to make their own choice of activities, caring for themselves and their environment. The setting offers the children a good foundation of learning and life skills, assisting them to fulfill their full individual potential. The adults have a clear view of their role within the setting. They are sensitive to each child's needs, and ensure that they are challenged, nurtured and safe. These are in accordance with Montessori's principles.

The school works closely with parents and carers, valuing them as an important partner in providing for each child's care and development. There is a detailed website available, along with an induction pack for all parents. The website is informative and places emphasis on the importance of the natural development of each child, and the importance of learning through individual freedom with structure, so that the children can meet their own individual needs within the prepared environments.

The staff within the school are experienced, motivated, committed, enthusiastic, spontaneous and very aware of each child's individual needs within the setting.

The Children's House in the Living Spring Montessori 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 enhance the garden area to allow the children further opportunities for learning and development by encouraging free flow between the classroom and outdoors.
- To provide a more comfortable and well-stocked book corner, to further learning opportunities.
- To extend opportunities for design, creativity and construction with a range of materials (such as building blocks).

Philosophy:

Both the owner and manager have a good understanding of the Montessori philosophy and a great commitment to providing a genuine Montessori environment. This commitment is apparent throughout the setting's day to day planning and is evident within the staffs practice. All staff members are encouraged to evaluate and develop their own knowledge in order to improve the prepared environment and provide for each child's individual needs. A good explanation of the Montessori philosophy and principles are given throughout the setting's literature. Montessori's descriptions of the child, the family and the prepared environment are reflected throughout the provision and by the staff team. Parents are considered to be an important partner in providing for each individual child's needs, development and making a child's experience of learning a positive one.

Learning and Development:

Living Spring Montessori operates from three classrooms with children aged between three months to five years; the room for 3 to 5 year olds (the Children's House) is the main Montessori classroom, in which Montessori materials are arranged and offered to the children throughout the work cycle. The setting makes full use of the benefits of vertical age grouping. The children are actively encouraged to share their knowledge for example, older children gaining confidence in helping the younger children, younger children learning by watching the older children. The children are actively encouraged to share their knowledge and understanding to each other. Staff work closely with each other in planning the curriculum, including weekly/monthly themes, group and individual activities. Long and short term plans are drawn up as a team.

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 and music and movement groups. Outdoor pursuits include nature study, physical games such as basket ball and practical care of the garden, vegetable and flower patches.

The staff show a secure 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 looked at weekly by the key person, and monthly as a whole team to ensure consistency and to share experiences and knowledge.

Daily observations are used to set achievable individual learning plans for each child. Staff are confident and show good skills in questioning children and allowing the child sufficient time to respond. There is flexibility in 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 attending, as well as allowing for spontaneous learning.

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

Prepared Environment: resources and materials

Living Spring Montessori is a large setting with a good range of equipment and resources offered to the children, the quantity of the materials provision is very good. The setting uses a rota system to ensure that the environment and materials are maintained to a high standard, are attractive and ordered in relation to the areas of learning. It is a spacious environment and the children are shown how to look after it. The adults provide the children with many learning opportunities, they acknowledge children's interests and their need for spontaneous play. The staff team plan a balanced curriculum for the children attending the setting by observing each child. The teachers understand their role in linking the child with the environment. A more comfortable and well stocked book corner would further learning opportunities and enhance the children's development.

The materials are set out around the classroom according to areas of the Montessori curriculum. They are systematically 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. On moving to the Children's House the children decorate their own placemats for lunch allowing the child to find their place more easily. Children are not allowed to misuse the materials (although exploration is encouraged), they are encouraged to respect each other's work space or to negotiate space and use of activities with their peers. They are encouraged to wait for an activity until their friend has finished using it. These boundaries are reinforced with 'reminders' for the children by each other and the teachers.

There are built in fish tanks into the walls around the school, which all children enjoy watching and taking care of them, also this has proven to be a very popular talking point for the children and teachers.

The children have regularly opportunities for physical development by using large physical materials in the outside area at set times in both morning and afternoon sessions. However enhancing the garden area to allow the children further opportunities for development, Considering free-flow into the outside area would allow the children more opportunities for development and learning.

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

Staff at Living Spring Montessori understand the importance of facilitating children's independence. From the time they start at the setting they are shown how to care for themselves, others and the environment. This is achieved through small and large group presentations such as how to pour their own refreshments or put their shoes and coats on. Children are given sufficient time to complete their task without adult interference. The snack routine demonstrates this as the children wash their hands, pour themselves a drink, take a plate and choose their fruit.

The children are given a lot of freedom of choice and are well supported in making decisions for themselves throughout the full morning and afternoon work cycles. Children can choose what they want to do inside the classroom, but the outside area is at set times only. They are encouraged to choose with whom and how they wish to work: individually, in a small group, larger group, or with a teacher,

The setting's parent induction meeting to the Children's House is very successful and informative. The literature provided and the website content are detailed and have a comprehensive explanation of the importance of the Montessori method and the importance of independence both in school and at home. Montessori practice is explained to parents of children new to the setting once a term, all parents also receive a termly newsletter. Parents are given feedback on a daily basis about their child's day. The school also hold yearly parent teacher meetings. Suggestions are offered at every opportunity on how to extend children's independence at home and the benefits of doing so.

Staff promote the idea that every child in the setting has a part to play in caring for the environment and all living things such as caring for the fish. The Montessori environment and the positive influence of the role models, promote the development of children's self-esteem, independence and self-respect.

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/carers, and with any visitors. Positive behaviour is also supported allowing children to negotiate with each other, through explanations, posters and by example. Children are taught to always be polite. 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 projects on other cultures.

Montessori practice: classroom management:

The Children's House is well organised and managed for the benefit of the children attending. A full Montessori work cycle is in place during the morning and afternoon sessions. The afternoon session starts at 2 p.m. and mirrors the morning sessions by offering children access to all the materials and areas in the classroom. There are also opportunities for activities such as cooking and music lessons if the children wish to join. During their time at the setting the children are presented materials and cared for by their key person as well as other adults, therefore enabling each child to build a good relationship with a variety of adults. The older children are encouraged to display a 'help' card or sit on a 'help' stool when they require assistance.

The children are confident and polite and seemed settled into the daily routine of the setting. The owner and manager have overall responsibility for health and safety, although all the teachers do daily risk assessments. All the adults are responsible for helping to maintain an orderly and safe environment and the classroom and garden areas are kept clean and safe for the children.

Policies and procedures are clear and easy to understand and support safe working practices. Risk assessments are carried out daily and reviewed when necessary. 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 continued self-evaluation and improvement, through weekly and monthly discussion. The staff team strives to provide a strong base for the future learning of the children.

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

The setting is well organised, with well-established adult routines and good interaction with parents. Parents are seen as partners in their children's learning and development. They are offered information evenings both when their child first joins the school and also on entering the Children's House (2½ to 5 year olds). They are also invited to attend an annual parent/teacher meeting. Parents feel welcomed and involved in the day to day activities and events of the setting. Living Spring Montessori School has excellent links with parents. Parents are seen as partners in their children's learning and development. The manager and owner have overall responsibility for health and safety, safe practice and maintaining a secure and safe environment. The setting has long term planning which details future events and projects for a year in which it names topics for each month which they share with the children and their families. 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 child's weekly observations and monthly summary sheet of their work and progress. Individual planning is available in the classroom during the session. 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 roles and it is documented. The structure creates a very enthusiastic and effective team. The process of staff induction is thorough and is reviewed once induction has been completed, as part of the probation period all staff have a mentor (are shadowed) for three months. Annual appraisals are undertaken. Inset days are planned for the year and show continuing professional development. The setting arranges external training at least twice a year and staff regularly attend local authority training courses . The setting's strong commitment to self-appraisal is evident in both written and practical form. The needs of the children with learning difficulties, English as an additional language, and disabilities are recognised and sensitively met by the setting. Staff work with the early years special educational needs team and parents to ensure that children's individual needs are met successfully. These issues are discussed regularly each month at staff meetings. The setting has good links with the local authority support network. All staff are committed to delivering Montessori education to the children attending the school.

Name of Assessor
Hatice D'jeral

Date of report
26/02/09