



# **Montessori Evaluation and Accreditation Board**

## **School Accreditation**

This report is prepared following two accreditation visits 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" (2008). The second visit sought to assess the progress made on the recommendations set out in the report from the first visit.

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.

### **Beckenham Montessori Pre-school**

United Reformed Church Hall, Oakhill Road, off Crescent Road, Beckenham,  
Kent BR3 6NQ

Dates of first accreditation visit: 8th February 2012

Date of second accreditation visit: 30<sup>th</sup> May 2012

This accreditation report relates to the provision for children aged 2 to 5 years

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

Beckenham Montessori Pre-school is based in a Victorian ancillary building of the United Reformed Church in Beckenham, Kent. The surrounding area is mainly residential and children arrive at the school on foot or by car. The school's accommodation comprises three classrooms, toilet facilities, a kitchen and a committee room which are linked by two corridors. The largest classroom has to be packed away each day, but the two other classrooms remain set up. The school also has access to a large hall and a small committee room when these are not otherwise occupied. The children have supervised access to the front paved area, as well as a small enclosed garden to the rear of the building.

The pre-school is privately owned by the head teacher who took over in 2002, although there has been a pre-school on the site since 1985. The head teacher has a Montessori international diploma and has also completed 'ICAN' training in speech and language, which is useful in her additional role of Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO). Of the additional 11 teaching staff, eight hold a Montessori international diploma, one is working towards an NVQ3, one is working towards an NVQ2 and one is a qualified children's nurse.

Beckenham Montessori school is registered by Ofsted for 46 children in total, 19 of whom may be aged between 2 and 3 years. The largest classroom is registered for 24 children in total, the middle classroom is registered for 12 children and the smallest classroom is registered for 10 children. There are currently 61 children on roll and the school supports children with special education needs and those with English as an additional language.

From Monday to Friday (during term-time) the school operates morning sessions from 9.00 to 12.30. Since January 2012 an additional choice of hours has been added to Tuesdays and



Thursdays, with some children staying for lunch only and others staying for lunch and an afternoon session until 15.00.' The children have French, gym and music and movement lessons once a week with visiting teachers. These activities take place during the morning session

### **Summary:**

Since the first visit the head teacher and her team have worked hard to review Montessori practice in the school. This is evident in the way in which children engage with their surroundings and with each other. Children's happiness, safety and achievements are at the heart of the school and the team-work and mutual respect shown by the staff mean that they are positive role models for the children.

***The school provides an education which follows the principles of the Montessori approach and environment. The school has successfully achieved the points for action recommended on the first visit, and this merits accreditation by the Montessori Evaluation and Accreditation Board. Consideration should be given to the following points for further development:***

- To ensure consistency in all three classrooms with regard to the minimum length of the work cycle
- To continue with the programme of improving the quality and organization of Montessori materials.
- To continue reviewing the process of updating children's records and the programme of longer observations and ensuring that all entries are dated.
- To embed the new programme of staff observations in the practice of the school.

### **Philosophy:**

The Montessori trained staff have a good understanding of Montessori practice and have recently reorganized the work cycle to ensure a minimum of 2 ½ hours, giving children time to follow their own interests. Since the first visit the layout of the classrooms, in particular the largest classroom, has been changed to allow children space to work and concentrate without disruptions.

The staff try to support children's independence and encourage them to try new activities, and recent changes have made it simpler for children to exercise freedom of choice. The children show trust and respect for the adults who clearly know the children very well.

The setting's educational principles, goals and philosophy are stated in writing in the prospectus; these are reviewed annually and link Montessori philosophy with current research. The aims and objectives are in accordance with Montessori philosophy. The prospectus also includes information regarding daily routines, which is also displayed on the parent's notice board in the front hall and in each class room.

### **Learning and Development:**

The head teacher co-ordinates and prepares the planning, although all members of staff are involved in the planning process which is thorough and completed with regard to the Montessori areas of learning and the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). In September project plans are



written for each half term for that academic year. Additional planning is done for each half term and individual planning is undertaken on a weekly and daily basis, bearing in mind children's differing abilities. Parents are given a copy of the forward topic planning so that they can support their children's learning.

Each child has a progress report file, which includes a checklist for the Montessori areas of learning. The key person completes observations of children throughout the day and records these in a notebook, which is then used to update the children's progress reports. Any member of staff can record observations of any child and these are recorded on 'post-it' notes and given to the key person. All staff with key children are currently reviewing the process of keeping children's records to ensure that they remain up to date.

The activities provided generally incorporate the six areas of learning, and further changes are planned to ensure this. The largest classroom is a very large room and having recently broken it down into smaller areas staff have noticed a positive impact on the way the children use the space. The children's access to the outside area has recently been extended with the use of 'free-flow' from the largest classroom to the paved area outside.

Since the first visit the daily routines of the school have changed to allow staff to follow children's individual needs more fully by supporting the completion of cycles of activity and freedom of choice

The progress of children with SENs is monitored and specialist help provided.

### **Prepared Environment: resources and materials**

Some of the Montessori materials have recently been extended and rearranged in order that children can access them more easily. A programme is in place to continue with this. A new area for Practical Life activities has been added and overall there is an acceptable range of materials and they are suitable for the children attending.

Since the first visit a 'rolling' snack system has been introduced in all rooms to ensure that the work cycle is no longer interrupted. The children now access the snack items independently, showing pride in their ability.

One of the strengths of the school is the quality and provision of art and craft opportunities for children. The children have freedom to experiment with a good range of art materials and enjoy making their own creations and they show pride in their achievements.

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

There are some good opportunities for children to develop independence. On arrival, the children 'self-register' – finding their own name cards, with the help of a picture for those who cannot yet recognize their name. Parents are present during this time so that they can share this moment with their child, and the head teacher informs them at their initial visits about the importance of fostering independence. When preparing for the gym session in the main hall children also take off their own shoes and socks, and put on their own coats to go outside at playtime. New opportunities for independence have been introduced since the first visit as the



children can now access snack when they wish - serving themselves and pouring their own drinks.

It is not possible for the school to have free-flow between the outside and inside for all classrooms due to the layout of the building. However free-flow has recently been introduced for the largest classroom and plans are being made to allow the other classes to access this space in the future. Within the classrooms children are able to move from one area to another, enjoying painting and craftwork when they choose. The children have the freedom to work together at tables or on the floor as floor mats have recently been reintroduced. Extending the work-cycle has given the children the confidence that they can work with their chosen activity for as long as they wish.

The staff help children to respect each other by asking older children to help new children to settle in and by encouraging children to ask each other for what they want. Staff speak kindly to the children and listen carefully to their views. Strategies such as introducing a timer are used when children become impatient to use an activity.

### **Montessori practice: classroom management**

Each class has a mixed age group and each child has a key person who monitors and works with the children throughout the work cycle, supported by the assistant staff. When the children arrive they self-register and can then choose any activities that they wish to do, including painting and craft, which they obviously enjoy very much. Parents may stay in the classrooms until 9.15. The snack tables are available in each classroom from 9.30 and children prepare their own snack when they are ready. They pour their own drinks and collect fruit and crackers, checking the posters which show them how many of each item they may have.

Since the first visit French lessons and gym classes are now held at the end of the morning, after the work cycle rather than at 11.10 or 11.40. The children really enjoy the gym session, which is held by the head teacher. Children are free to continue their work in the classroom if they do not wish to participate. At the end of the work-cycle the children are divided into groups for outdoor playtime or playtime in the hall depending on the weather. All children go home for lunch on Monday, Wednesday and Friday, and some children stay until 15.00 on Tuesday and Thursday and bring a packed lunch. The staff take the safety of the children very seriously and there are good policies, procedures and routines in place for this.

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

The head teacher ensures that staff understand their responsibilities, through inductions, regular staff meetings and detailed job descriptions. The daily routine of the school runs smoothly because staff work very well together as a team. This is a strength of the school, as the nature of the building presents challenges in setting this routine, for example, someone has to be on 'door duty' at arrival and departure times, and staff also need to take children to the toilets. The largest classroom has to be cleared every day and new routines have been introduced to try to minimize disruption for the children.

A new system has been introduced to ensure that children's records remain up to date and a programme of extended observations of children has been introduced since the first visit.



Each child has a contact diary, which they take home every day and which parents and teachers use to inform each other of notable events. A project list is also put into these contact diaries every half term, with details of project, colour and sounds to be covered. Consequently parents feel involved in their children's learning. Meetings with parents are arranged termly at times convenient for the families.

Parents are given a progress report on their child at the end of the school year and they are asked to comment on these and are invited to meet with their child's key worker during their child's last term at the school. Summative reports are prepared for children's next schools.

Parents speak highly of the head teacher and her staff and feel that they do all they can to help their children. Parents have received information about the school's Key Person policy and they know who their child's key person is. They receive regular informative newsletters and feel that they can ask for a meeting with their child's key person at any time. The school organizes family activities such as sports day and a Christmas concert. A form is sent to all parents annually so that they can comment on the service offered by the school.

### **Staffing:**

All staff employed at the school hold a recognized childcare qualification, with eight holding a full international Montessori diploma and one staff member working towards a Post Graduate Certificate in Montessori Education. The head teacher, together with two of her staff, have completed 'ICAN' training in speech and language; two staff have completed a three year degree in early years at Greenwich University and they continue this year for Early Years Professional Status. A new staff member, who holds an NVQ3 childcare diploma, has recently been appointed for a probationary period. The room leaders report directly to the head teacher. All staff have received training in first-aid and safeguarding children, or are booked on courses to update these skills. The school has accessed training from the local authority and other providers, covering a range of subjects.

New staff spend time in each classroom and are given the school's policies to read, together with a timetable and a job description. They are introduced to the safety provisions and the record-keeping method and shown how they can contribute to these. The staff have half-termly meetings and these are used to discuss the operation of the school and the effectiveness of planning. There has been an appraisal system and 'peer-to-peer' observations in recent times and the head teacher is planning to reinstate these. Each member of staff has a detailed job description. The head teacher and her staff are committed to continued professional development and they clearly enjoy working together. A programme of observations of staff has been introduced since the first visit and this will serve to inform the assessment of classroom management and of the quality of teaching.

The happiness and safety of the children are the staff's priority and this is evident in the self reflection and team-work they have shown this year in reviewing all of the school's procedures and in the positive changes they have made. Their dedication and commitment will help them to move forward with their Montessori practice.



Name of Assessor: Susie Norman

Date of reports:

First visit – 8<sup>th</sup> February 2012

Second visit – 30<sup>th</sup> May 2012