

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.

Beanstalk Montessori Nursery School

St Peter’s Church, Black Lion Lane, Hammersmith W6 9BG

Visited on 3 December 2008

Description of the school:

Beanstalk Montessori Nursery has been operating under the current management since 2004. It is located within church premises in a residential area of Hammersmith, and consists of a large classroom that can be partitioned for the use of separate activities if required, plus two smaller rooms. The outdoor area is used daily and includes a large garden with sandpit, playhouse, climbing frames and gardening plot.

The nursery is registered for up to 40 children between the ages of two and five years old with 41 children currently on roll. It is open from 9.00 am until 4.00pm with children attending a variety of sessions or full days.

All six members of staff are appropriately qualified with five holding Montessori qualifications.

Summary and conclusion.

Beanstalk Montessori Nursery offers children a warm, caring and enjoyable environment where Montessori practice is evident and, overall, well-applied. Montessori teaching staff show a good awareness of educational principles but do not always follow them through in practice consistently. Staff work hard to protect children’s freedom, independence and right to choose activities in accordance with Montessori principles. At times greater re-direction of children is required as is more encouragement to explore a range of Montessori materials. Staff are mindful of Montessori ground rules such as walking in the classroom, using quiet voices inside, listening carefully when others are talking and protecting the concentration of individual children but they do not always encourage them appropriately in practice.

Children have access to a good range of resources, most of which are well presented and easily accessible. With the exception of Practical Life materials, there is a good range of resources at the Nursery that are suitable for all the children who attend. The Nursery has

an impressive range of materials to supplement the Montessori curriculum though at times these are used at the expense of the Montessori equipment.

Systems for planning and recording children's progress are in place and staff are in the process of reintroducing a Montessori curriculum checklist to track progress more effectively and to inform planning. Since this system is not fully in place, some opportunities to extend children's learning are missed and progress through the Montessori curriculum is uneven.

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 the school should consider the following points for further development:

- Review the Practical Life shelf more regularly so that it provides more varied and stimulating activities suitable for the age group that attends. Ensure that children are encouraged to access the Montessori materials and that apparatus is presented correctly both on the shelves and to the children.
- Encourage children to respect Montessori ground rules more consistently.
- Continue to develop a system for recording children's progress systematically through the Montessori curriculum and use this to inform more structured curriculum planning. Ensure that records are completed appropriately and that entries are dated.
- Establish a formal system of recording observations of staff to ensure that the whole team are applying Montessori principles consistently and using materials correctly.

Philosophy:

The Nursery's educational goals, aims and philosophy are defined with staff, overall, having a good knowledge and understanding of Montessori's philosophy.

The owner has a clear view of Montessori philosophy and of how it should be applied throughout the Nursery. The staff are genuinely committed to their role within the Nursery and to Montessori's ethos. They contribute to providing a happy and relaxed atmosphere where children thoroughly enjoy a variety of stimulating activities but in practice Montessori's philosophy is not always applied consistently or monitored as effectively as it could be.

Learning and Development:

The staff are involved in planning through weekly meetings. Staff discuss how group activities can be differentiated to cater for individual needs. The Nursery has in place long term, short term and individual plans which guides their practice, and plans to start using a Montessori Check List to record children's progress through the Montessori curriculum areas.

The Nursery provides some wonderful learning activities for the children and staff are keen to

utilize their observations to ensure that children get the best from their time with them. However, in practice, the lack of an established system for recording children's progress throughout the Montessori curriculum means that not all opportunities are fully exploited and not all children get the best from each activity. Consequently, though staff are keen to 'follow the child' in accordance with Montessori's principles, steady and consistent progress throughout the Montessori curriculum is not always achieved.

Prepared Environment, resources and materials:

Overall, the Nursery is organised well and most materials are accessible. However, some materials are arranged incorrectly in accordance with Montessori practice such as some Practical Life and Sensorial apparatus. Children are free to explore the materials creatively and this is a real strength.

Some of the noisier activities, such as climbing, have a tendency to disturb quieter pastimes such as reading, and the lack of suitable individual work space at times compromises children's ability to concentrate on their chosen task.

The Nursery benefits from a wonderful selection of materials and activities to supplement the Montessori programme but these are often offered at the expense of the Montessori materials themselves. The materials displayed within Montessori area of Practical Life do not do justice to the overall good practice within the Nursery and do not meet the needs of the full age range catered for within the setting.

A wonderful selection of activities and resources is available for the children to use outside.

Montessori practice, with comments on *independence, independence at home, freedom, respect:*

Children's independence is encouraged through staff giving the children choices, encouraging them to explore the environment freely and helping them to develop good habits of personal hygiene.

Children are able to work alone or in small groups and are given the freedom and time to complete activities before moving on to something else. The sense of the Nursery being the children's environment is a real strength of the setting but at times children would benefit from greater re-direction or invitation to work with staff on more developmentally challenging Montessori materials.

Children choose where to work within the classroom and staff provide good opportunities for the children to work outside. However, children are not always able to respect the work space of others effectively due to the lack of suitable individual work space.

Children are encouraged to care for their environment by returning Montessori activities to the shelf or clearing away their snack utensils. They also clear up spillages. Routine tidying of the

general environment is encouraged to promote a good sense of responsibility.

Montessori ground rules such as walking in the classroom, using quiet voices inside, not interrupting others, or listening carefully when someone is talking are followed, but they are not always encouraged consistently by staff.

Parents are overall well-informed on Montessori practices, though staff do not always encourage parents to allow their children freedom whilst hanging up coats for example during the morning drop-off routine.

Montessori Practice, classroom management:

Staff respect the longest possible work cycle which is approximately three hours and this is a strength of the Nursery. Children are free to choose activities during that time, both inside and outside.

During the indoor work period, children are able to choose activities, and overall the classroom is well managed. However practice amongst staff is not always consistent, particularly with regard to the presentation of Montessori materials, the encouragement of some ground rules and the appropriate re-direction of children. Greater emphasis on staff observation and a more focused approach to the Montessori curriculum would address this.

Montessori Practice: with comments on *adults' routines, links with parents, including reports and records.*

Adults within the Nursery work well as a team and support each other effectively. There is evidence of good teamwork and roles and responsibilities are clearly defined. Overall, the adults maintain the environment well though not all materials are presented correctly either to the children or on the shelves.

The Nursery is currently looking to develop their system of record keeping which takes into account the Early Years Foundation Stage Guidance but strengthens the delivery of Montessori ethos. Staff maintain children's records but not all entries are dated or evaluated fully so as to record progress systematically or inform planning comprehensively. The Montessori curriculum checklists have only recently been re-introduced and are not yet informing planning or recording.

There are excellent relationships with parents who are kept well-informed about their child's progress overall and good systems are in place for sharing information both formally and informally. There is less information available on the Montessori ethos within the school or on the children's progress through the Montessori curriculum.

Staffing:

Staff work well as a team and overall they create a warm, caring and fun environment for the children. Core teaching staff are clearly dedicated to Montessori philosophy and the owner has a strong belief in the Nursery's ethos. Self-evaluation is considered important and staff are mindful of evaluating their practice regularly through both informal and formal means. There are no written observations of staff to identify clearly strengths and areas for development in Montessori practice. Similarly, no mention is made of Montessori practice within documentation such as appraisals or job descriptions. Not all staff undergo formal appraisals and subsequently, not all practice is in accordance with Montessori ethos.

The teaching staff are well led by management overall, and all of them possess a genuine love of children and a strong desire to follow Montessori practice more consistently within the Nursery.

Name of Assessor: Serena Gunn
2008

Date of report: 3rd December