



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.

Bright Learners Montessori School

Wesley Hall, 9 Staplyton Road, Barnet, Herts EN5 4JJ

Date of first accreditation visit: 18 November 2011

Date of second accreditation visit: 2 March 2012

This accreditation report relates to the provision for children aged 18 months to 5 years.

Description of the school

Bright Learners is a privately owned Montessori school which was established nearly 75 years ago. It is run from a large, modern hall in the centre of Barnet. There is a spacious carpeted reception area, with a secure door from the street. From here doors lead to separate lavatories, a large kitchen and the children’s cloakroom. The hall has shared use and the school is set up and cleared away each day. All the children have access to a secure garden which is situated behind the hall.

The school is registered with Ofsted for 30 children between 18 months and 5 years of age, of whom no more than four can be under 2 years old. There were 42 children on roll at the time of the first visit and 54 at the second visit. Children attend a mixture of sessions, either mornings, mornings with lunch, or afternoons. The school is open during term times from 09:00 until 15:00 and provides for children with special educational needs as well as for those for whom English is an additional language.

The school is managed by the owner who is present daily. She is supported by a deputy manager, who takes responsibility in her absence. There are six other staff members, working mainly part time, and an apprentice who has worked at the school for eight months. Six out of the eight staff members hold Montessori teaching qualifications.



Summary and conclusion:

Bright Learners Montessori offers a very warm and welcoming atmosphere, where a commitment to Montessori philosophy and practice is evident. It offers a spacious indoor Montessori environment, with an extensive range of materials and resources and an ethos that encourages freedom of choice and independence for children. The outdoor area is small but is skilfully resourced and children have access to it throughout the session.

Through continuous training, the manager has developed a strong staff team who are committed to the Montessori ethos and uphold expectations of high standards of behaviour. Their trust and respect for children is evident in their interactions and the quality of their communication.

Staff at Bright Learners Montessori have worked very hard to ensure that the recommendations from the first visit have been carried out. The manager has successfully delegated tasks to the deputy and all staff have worked co-operatively in planning new self evaluation documentation and Montessori progress reports for parents. The manager has co-ordinated the development of a school website that will provide further information and links for parents.

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:

- continue to embed the new self-reflection and monitoring tools.

Philosophy:

Bright Learners Montessori school genuinely follows the Montessori philosophy and principles, and a calm and purposeful atmosphere is felt on entering the classroom. Staff have a very good understanding of the Montessori ethos and are consistent in their approach to behaviour. The child is put first in all areas and treated with great respect and in a caring manner; consequently children are respectful, confident, relaxed and happy. Staff support children effectively in their learning and development through regular observations, open questioning and reflective listening skills.

The school's aims and objectives are stated in the prospectus where there is an explanation of the Montessori philosophy and how the school adheres to this in its practice. Literature and information about Montessori education and the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) is available on the parents' notice board and hall table. Staff feel comfortable to question, re-examine and re-define principles and practices at regular staff meetings, although informal verbal communication between staff remains the main form of communication within this strong team.



Learning and Development:

Bright Learners provides rich and diverse learning experiences for children, which closely reflect the mix of cultures at the school. The classroom is thoughtfully laid out with a wide range of learning areas and materials including excellent art, ICT and 'Let's Pretend' areas. Children are free to explore the environment inside and outside during the work cycle and are very well supported in their progress by attentive and respectful staff.

The staff plan together on a variety of levels. Long term planning is reflected in the prepared learning environment, where all Montessori and EYFS curriculum areas are appropriately provided for. Short term planning is flexible around a theme or topic of interest for the children, or a seasonal/cultural event. Teachers take turns to produce good, detailed daily lesson plans. Since the first visit the deputy manager has designed a new lesson plan template with a detailed evaluation on the reverse of the sheet. These are collated to make a school evaluation/reflective folder. The sheets are discussed at staff meetings. Any changes to practice will be recorded formally and may be used to inform future planning and staff appraisals. The staff appraisals have also been redesigned to include details of each person's skills/interests that may be utilized at the school as well as including Montessori classroom skills and any training required. The self evaluation folder and appraisals provide senior staff with an effective and formal means of monitoring the learning and development provision as well as the continued professional development of staff, for the benefit of the children.

Staff are very good at ensuring that each child's individual learning and development is recorded in a profile book with commentary, photographs and links to the EYFS areas of learning. These are observation-based assessments, which follow a child's current interests. Next step targets are detailed and followed through. The parents' input sheet in the profile is effective in encouraging parents to maintain knowledge of and an interest in their child's progress.

The school capably meets its objective of supporting children with additional needs by providing increased adult support, adapting activities and ensuring that the necessary help is in place. For example, there are copies of the school prospectus in many languages. Parental involvement and multi-agency working is promoted through daily discussions, emails and meetings, and termly Individual Educational Plans (IEPs) are effectively put in place and progress closely monitored.

Prepared Environment: resources and materials

This classroom is aesthetically pleasing, with a wooden floor, good natural light, lots of space and a well thought out arrangement of appropriate equipment, carpeting and furniture. The careful layout of recently purchased tables and chairs adds to the harmony of the room. Space is used effectively to encourage children to work in small groups, whole group activities and to work with resources independently, including tidying them away when finished. Both inside and outside there is a wide and imaginative range of well maintained and clearly labeled materials in each of the Montessori areas of learning, although some Sensorial pieces are a little worn. Children have freedom to access all activities as they are provided within their reach and are systematically arranged in areas to support learning.

The small outside area is very effectively utilized, with a good range of equipment and materials



such as heuristic and block play. The activities provided reflect the interests of the children and are rotated regularly, with other resources stored in an outdoor shed. Staff are efficient at working as a team in supporting children should they choose to work outside.

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

Children display independence by hanging their coats, self-registering by posting their name in a box and by having the opportunity to partake in a work cycle of about two and a half hours, with free flow between the indoor and outdoor environments. Children are given time to complete self-chosen activities without unnecessary interruption and they are encouraged to help maintain their environment by clearing up after themselves and by looking after it, through such tasks as caring for the plants. Due to the shared use of the building children must be accompanied to the toilet and they are supported in requesting this help independently. Snack is freely available, with a staff member available to assist the individual as required. With larger numbers of children a group snack is arranged where children select their fruit and pour their own drinks. Staff ensure that this snack is part of the work cycle, giving children the freedom to choose when to participate.

Staff trust children to work independently or in small groups, and children are given the opportunity to join pre-arranged activities like yoga should they wish to. This works very well, with some children choosing to continue their cycle of activity, while others enjoy yoga in the class. Staff are very respectful and consistent in their approach to behaviour, especially in their use of appropriate and encouraging language. Consequently, interactions between children and staff are positive and encourage good levels of discourse and concentration. Staff promote respect for the environment by ensuring it is clean, ordered and appealing and act as good role models for children. They support children in following the clear ground rules and enable them to be active participants in the classroom.

The school has addressed the recommendation made on the first visit with regard to developing partnerships with parents to support independence at home. A parent is invited into the classroom each week to observe their child and learn more about the school. A website is being developed which will have a copy of the school policies, the current newsletter and links to the wider Montessori community. This may take some time to become fully embraced by parents and so paper copies will also be available.

Staff are very adept at encouraging children to express their emotions through the use of resources such as video cameras, a well stocked 'Let's Pretend' area and an excellent selection of puppets and books that reflect the cultural mix of the school. The adults help promote self-confidence and respect by facilitating a continuous work cycle, good self-care routines and the development of social skills such as conflict resolution and turn-taking.

Montessori practice: classroom management

Subsequent to the recommendation made on the first visit, the owner/manager has successfully delegated responsibility for planning and evaluating lessons to her deputy. This has resulted in a more formal means of tracking any changes to practice. These evaluations can now be used to



inform future planning, staff meetings and staff appraisals and are an effective management tool.

The manager is supported by an excellent and experienced staff team who work closely to ensure a good balance of planned and spontaneous learning is achieved. Learning is supported through long term and daily lesson plans and a comprehensive policy documentation folder. These policies demonstrate a commitment to Montessori philosophy and practice and link with the EYFS.

All children from 18 months to 5 years are vertically grouped and there is an effective key worker system in place. Staff have clear written roles and responsibilities which are also being enhanced by more clearly stating a commitment to Montessori practice and continued professional development. There is a good balance of individual and teacher-led activities during the two and a half hour work cycle, and all children are aware of expected behaviour, (these are clearly stated on cards in the book area).

Montessori Practice: links with parents, including reports and records

All staff know the children very well and are supportive in facilitating their learning. They keep detailed observations, records and photographs for each child in a profile folder. These are recorded in the six EYFS areas of learning. The profile folder also contains separate individual learning records arranged by Montessori areas under the headings presented, spontaneous repetition, competency and spontaneous exploration.

Following the initial visit parents are now provided with chronological and dated Montessori progress sheets which give them more effective evidence of learning and development. The annual written reports are good and include a section for parents to make comments. These are sent to parents and to the child's next school. Information about discussions with parents are recorded in the diary or on the daily notice board/message book.

Parents are supportive of the school and feel welcomed. They highly value the open policy of communication established by the manager through informal talks, newsletters and open evenings.

Parents benefit from the 'getting to know you' leaflet and the informative initial visits to the school. A good written summary, focusing on social, emotional and language development is given to parents following their child's first term. This serves as evidence to address any issues that may have arisen. The school has a toy monkey and camera which goes home with children supporting topic work and encouraging links with home. There is appropriate information about the school in the hallway and parents accompany children on nursery outings and to the annual art exhibition at the school. There are also two parents evenings held each year.

Following recommendations from the first visit, the deputy manager made a reflective questionnaire for staff to state their ideas about how to develop and extend the school's partnerships with parents. The suggestion of inviting a parent into the classroom, to observe their child and learn more about the school, is proving to be successful and popular with parents. The manager has also rewritten the school welcome pack, staff induction pack and extended the newsletter to include information about the wider Montessori community and training opportunities. One parent has already signed up to a Montessori training course. The



manager is developing the school's website in order to further develop communications with parents, including providing links to Montessori articles and where to purchase materials to use at home. This may take some time to be fully integrated into practice.

Staffing:

Staff work very well as a committed and close team. Six out of eight staff have a Montessori qualification. Many of them have worked at Bright Learners for more than four years and their enthusiasm and pride in the school is evident in their flexible working practices and ease at recording observations, record keeping and planning. They have clearly defined written roles and responsibilities.

Following the first visit, the manager has rewritten the staff induction pack, the welcome pack and each job description. These state the school's Montessori aims very clearly, giving an excellent and informative explanation of Montessori history and philosophy as well as Montessori teaching methods. These new packs will enable the staff and parents to differentiate Bright Learners as they genuinely reflect the excellent Montessori practice at the school.

New staff appraisals include sections for the appraisal of Montessori knowledge and Montessori classroom skills. The new lesson evaluations will be used to inform these appraisals once the process is fully integrated into practice. Staff now appreciate the need to be able to track where any changes in practice have come from and how this information will be used to inform continued professional development.

Observations of staff, both by the manager and other staff, are recorded and used to inform annual staff appraisals and monitor any training required. Staff undertake a wide range of continued professional development and this is very evident throughout the school. Recently staff attended a 'small circles' training in relation to drawing out the quiet child and this was evident in the level of encouraging language used during the visit.

Bright Learners is a well-led setting, and the manager has risen to the challenge of delegating certain tasks such as lesson planning and evaluating. Consequently she has had time to produce very detailed and informative induction and welcome packs that reflect the school's commitment to, and knowledge of, Montessori practice. Her team have also been able to focus more on reflective practices and the promotion of the setting's philosophy, and this will continue. It is clear that the whole team at Bright Learners is very committed to its Montessori ethos and practice and share a sense of purpose in implementing these for the benefit of children's learning and development.

Name of Assessor: Carolyn McNeill

Date of report: 5th March 2012