

# 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.

The report does not address the standards and quality issues which are the responsibility of the office of Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales (Estyn) which reports separately. Also the report does not provide any assessment of financial aspects of the school.

### **The Children's Room**

13 St James Gardens, Uplands, Swansea SA1 6DY

Date of accreditation visit: 23 June 2010

This accreditation report relates to the provision for children aged two to four years

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

The Children's Room is situated in the residential area of Uplands, Swansea. The nursery occupies the ground floor of a residential property and consists of two classrooms with access to a small outside courtyard.

A park/communal garden area is located directly opposite the nursery and is used on a daily basis.

The Children's Room is open from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. daily during term times. The nursery offers a variety of part time or full time care and is registered to take 16 children at any one time. Twenty-five children, the majority aged 2 to 3 years, are currently on the nursery roll.

The nursery is led by the proprietor and four other members of staff. All staff hold an appropriate childcare qualification and two members of staff are Montessori qualified.

#### **Summary and conclusion.**

The Children's Room provides a positive and enriching learning environment for the children who attend the setting. The school's aim of fostering personal, social, and emotional skills through the promotion of positive attitudes and motivation to learn is clearly seen in the high levels of involvement that all the children display.

The team place particular emphasis on the atmosphere of the school and thus their calm dispositions, together with the attention to detail in the prepared environment, promote the tranquil environment that was felt at all times during the visit.

The staff are good role models to the children responding to their needs through shared interaction, which allows the child the freedom and choice to be motivated and inspired to explore; discover and problem solve. Very young, new children who have only recently

joined the school are happy to come into the class and immediately engage themselves with activities. All children are calm, content and eager to be involved.

Children display confidence and trust within their environment which supports their needs through an uninterrupted work-cycle; for many children it is three hours long, thus promoting the child's freedom of choice and independence.

***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 continue to reflect on ways to promote the three-hour work cycle whilst including visits to the park.
- To review and reflect on the observation, assessment and planning documentation with emphasis on highlighting the 'next steps' for the child.
- To review and reflect on the layout of the curriculum areas.

#### **Philosophy:**

The Children's Room offers a calm and inviting environment that supports the nursery's overall aim of fostering the children's personal, social and emotional skills. Adults are excellent role models, quietly observing and interacting when children require guidance and support.

The children have access to flow freely between the two classrooms and the small outside courtyard. Activities and resources are easily accessible by all children, allowing them opportunities to work and play spontaneously. Children are consistently involved and engaged with their chosen activity; this is clear evidence in practice of the nursery's ethos of nurturing positive attitudes to learning.

#### **Learning and Development:**

The Children's Room promotes independence and spontaneous work. Children are free to move between the rooms, being directed by their natural work rhythm. The areas of learning are defined with Practical Life activities and skills that effectively meet the needs of the majority of the 2 year old children who attend the school. Through their ability to access resources independently, enabling them to collect, sort, match, and compare a variety of different objects, the children showed high levels of motivation and curiosity about things and processes. These resources are accessible in both rooms and the outside courtyard.

Children self-register for the outside area, as only six children are allowed outside at any one time. Children choose a necklace and wait their turn if no necklace is available. This supports the free flow effectively.

Developmental records are kept in accordance with the Montessori Curriculum and in line with the Early Years Foundation Phase (Wales). Notes are made daily of activities the children use. However, opportunities are missed to record more in-depth observations which would provide a clearer insight into the child's progress. Longer observation would give evidence of connections between areas of learning, providing the Key Person with clear information recording 'where the child is at' and 'where the child might go next'.

The team support each other and act as guides and role models, facilitating children's learning yet stepping back when required.

**Prepared Environment: resources and materials:**

The classrooms are organised according to the Montessori curriculum and areas of learning.

A good range of materials are available and appropriate for the age group, with a high emphasis on all areas of practical life skills and early stages of sensorial resources. Materials and activities are of high quality and attention to detail and maintenance of the environment is good.

Space is sometimes limited and movement within the rooms can be challenging. Opportunities to stimulate imagination, free expression and the ability to make connections (including the opportunities to repeat activities) are missed by not having more creativity activities freely accessible for the children.

Floor space is limited and thus hinders freedom of movement and spacial awareness of the younger children in the group. Consideration should be given to increasing the accessibility of the sensorial equipment.

Adults support the children's movement and make suggestions where mats can be placed, but initiative and independent thinking are limited because of this interruption to the child's flow of activity and rhythm of work.

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

All children demonstrate great levels of independence. They access activities and resources themselves and clearly respect the ground rules of the nursery, responding positively to aspects of safeguarding by reminding and showing their friends how to do things. This was particularly evident when the children were caring for the rabbits. Children choose to spontaneously work and play individually, in pairs or in a small group and are respectful of each other. Levels of concentration are good.

A rolling snack system is effective in enabling children to eat at their preferred pace and time. An adult helps the smaller children, supporting and presenting specific skills including buttering toast.

Children change out of their outside shoes on arrival and again when they visit the park, thus providing plenty of opportunities to learn the necessary skills for dressing themselves. Parents support children's independence, especially on arrival at school when children are encouraged to do this for themselves.

The team work effectively together and this contributes to the active, happy learning environment.

**Montessori practice: classroom management:**

Both morning and afternoon sessions have a three hour work cycle which includes free flow to the small outside courtyard and access to the rolling snack. Daily, towards the end of each session, the children are invited to accompany teachers to the park which is located directly opposite the nursery. The team work well together in ensuring that children who are engaged with activities are not disturbed, and this practice will be strengthened when new children join in September.

Teaching is individual, in pairs and small groups and evolves according to the children's needs and interests.

A Key Person system is in place and all staff contribute to the writing of observations. A scrap book displaying the children's 'learning journey' provides a concrete record of development. The current system of observations does not effectively provide clear evidence of what is happening to support learning and development for the children. It does show the progress the children make with the Montessori materials.

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

The Children's Room provides good opportunities for parental involvement. In particular parents welcome the daily positive informal communication they have with all team members. The entrance hall is fully utilized with information regarding the nursery, the Montessori curriculum, current newsletters and upcoming events. The annual Christmas party has now become an extended family event that takes place in a nearby community hall.

There is a co-ordinator for health and safety, SEN, child protection, first aid and food hygiene. Staff meetings are clearly recorded and provide a time for reflection and review of procedures and outcomes.

Links with the local authority are good and include support for children with Learning Difficulties.

**Staffing:**

Team work is exceptionally good and this creates a welcoming atmosphere for the children, thus enhancing confidence for all.

The staffing and responsibilities of each team member are clearly defined. During the annual appraisals these are referred to and reflected upon as part of the on-going development plan. Documentation for all aspects relating to safeguarding and children's welfare in line with Welsh legislation is in place. A format for peer observation would enhance the current system effectively.

Training over the last year and for the immediate future is focused on the Montessori Philosophy. This supports the on-going commitment to implementing the Montessori Curriculum by the leader and the team and is highlighted effectively through the planned training with involvement on the Montessori Infant/Toddler workshop.

The leadership of the team is strong and effectively promotes the important aspect of trust, thus enabling all members to actively respond loyally to the delegation of roles for areas of responsibility

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Name of Assessor: Dawn Nasser

Date of report: 30 June 2010