

Montessori Evaluation and Accreditation Board

School Accreditation

This report follows an accreditation visit made on behalf of the Montessori Evaluation and Accreditation Board. It considers how far the school follows Montessori approaches. 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.

The Gower School

10 Cynthia Street, Barnsbury, London N1 1BS

Description of the school:

The Gower School, Cynthia Street is a fully refurbished and purpose designed school built as a sustainable building. It has three large classrooms, one medium classroom used for art and science, two small classrooms used for group/music teaching, a library and ICT room, multi-purpose hall, kitchen with child height facilities, nine children's toilets, three staff toilets including a disabled toilet, a platform lift, office and staff room with courtyard.

The outside facilities include a science and nature garden including quiet sitting area, dipping pond, fish pond with fountain, growing area and pets. The roof garden includes a growing area and quiet areas to work located off first floor large and medium classrooms.

The school is open from 8 a.m. to 6:30 p.m. Monday to Friday, and is registered for 30 four year olds and 50 school age children.

Summary and conclusion:

The Gower School demonstrates very good staff induction, training, and team work. The Montessori philosophy is embedded in the practices of the school and followed by all staff. The curriculum is broad and follows the Montessori Method and Early Years Foundation Stage. Children's special educational needs are very well met. All the materials and resources are of a high standard. The school demonstrates excellent Montessori practice in regard to child independence, freedom and respect. Many children help each other and show a love of learning. The children have high self esteem and self assurance. Parent partnership is very evident and parents are very involved in the life of the school.

The school provides an education in accordance with the principles of the Montessori approach and environment. This merits accreditation by the Montessori Evaluation and Accreditation Board, but there should be further work on staff development and management.

Philosophy:

In the entrance hall there is a board displaying the principles and goals of the school. In addition the children add comments on what they like about school. These principles and goals will be underpinned by descriptions of the roles of Presenter, Floater and Assistant which are currently being introduced into the staff job descriptions.

The Montessori philosophy is embedded in practice and adhered to by all staff.

Curriculum:

Each child has an Individual Learning Plan which is written every half term. This is supported by a weekly plan. The individual learning plan is written based on previous observations captured on the weekly plans.

An extremely broad spectrum of Montessori and supplementary activities is provided. Activities are provided in classrooms, the art and science room and outside space. Children are given the freedom to choose activities in different environments at will.

Teachers observe children throughout the day and document this on the weekly planning sheets.

Children's additional or special needs are met very well. There is a quiet room in the Foundation class where children can go to do their work. The additional materials that are appropriate to their needs are laid out on shelves, complementing the Montessori approach. Children are invited to work in the room with one to one support from a teacher and the children can also come and go from the room as they please.

Resources and materials:

In both classrooms there is an excellent range of materials, laid out systematically and in different areas. All materials are of a very high quality, new and kept clean. All classrooms are aesthetically pleasing with ample resources to cater for number of children.

All materials are suitable and accessible to all the children.

There is space in every area for a few children to work at the same time either at tables or on the floor on a large mat or small individual mats.

Staffing:

Staff training is excellent. Staff confirm that the training had a significant impact on Montessori Practice and Early Years Foundation Stage. For example, best practice is reflected in policies, and staff demonstrate proper use of the Montessori method.

There is excellent team work between staff members.

The school has an induction policy and procedure in place, and a new member of

staff confirmed that the induction procedure is thorough and functions well. Job Descriptions are in place but are currently being reviewed and re-written to include Montessori roles. All the teachers have had an input into what they want to go into the job descriptions.

Through formal and informal staff meetings the Principal demonstrates an openness to feedback and suggestions from staff.

Informal staff observations are in place but are not currently formally recorded. A new system is being developed to start in September 2008.

The school handles children's dietary needs well. Allergy lists are displayed in the office, kitchen and classrooms. A weekly balanced vegetarian menu is provided.

The records of each child's progress are extensive. They include Montessori materials and Early Learning Goals which are updated each term. Individual learning plans are written every half term.

The school invests a significant sum in resources every term. The staff input their requirements and suggestions and these are taken into account.

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

The children have plenty of time in the morning to get themselves ready, hang up coats. The bow on one child's dress was open and the teacher took the opportunity to show her how to tie the bow, she watched very carefully and smiled.

Children have time to complete an activity and concentrated well.

The Principal organises lots of talks with parents to encourage the child's independence at home. This was confirmed in discussions with parents.

The children are given many opportunities to work individually or in different sized groups throughout the work cycle.

The children are free to work in a variety of environments inside and outside. The children in the 6 to 9 class moved freely between the classroom, the art/science room and the terrace.

The children are free to choose their own activities and largely direct themselves although occasionally the teacher directs the children working with them one to one.

The children all support each other; for example, one child went over to his friend and asked if he could help him with his work.

The children are all very happy and content. They display great self esteem and self assurance.

The children show respect for the environment, taking out one piece of equipment at a time and putting work away. They handle the materials well.

Montessori practice: *classroom management*

The daily work cycle is three hours long; this is appropriate. Four to five year olds are in the Foundation class and six to nine year olds are in the Primary class. A key worker system is in place for planning, recording, and assessment; however, all teachers work with all children in the class.

Montessori practice: *adults' routines links with parents, including reports and records.*

The school has comprehensive policies in place with regard to children's wellbeing and safety. The staff demonstrate a good awareness of the children's needs and ensure that all areas of the school are safe. The children are also supported emotionally.

All the materials are in excellent condition and are kept clean and tidy. The children play an active role in cleaning and tidying the classroom through the practical life activities.

The teachers record observations throughout the morning. The child's individual learning plan is written based on previous observations captured on the weekly plans. The records of each child's progress are extensive. They include a Montessori materials tick list and Early Learning Goals list which are updated each term.

Individual learning plans are written every half term.

Parents are invited into class once a week to work with the children. Teachers are available every Tuesday for parent teacher meetings. Every parent receives a Parent Handbook on joining the school and newsletters are sent out regularly via email.

Parents receive weekly and end of term reports which provide an overview of the child's progress.

In addition the Principal organises parent talks three times a year covering the Montessori philosophy and approach, independence at home, freedom of choice, and the Montessori approach to language and maths. These talks are very popular and well attended.