

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

18 North Road, Islington, London N7 9EY

Description of the school:

The Gower School, 18 North Road, Islington opened in September 2000 and is housed in a converted seventies vicarage and church hall, situated close to the Caledonian Road tube station. There are six classrooms, as well as a music room, kitchen, two offices and laundry. The setting is open from 8.00 a.m. until 6.30 p.m. from Monday to Friday, 48 weeks of the year and is registered for 95 children from the ages of three months to five years old. Currently there are 112 on the roll. There is also a fully enclosed garden incorporating three divided areas for sports, decking (for yoga and drama) and the main play area. Twenty-six staff are employed. The Principal has Early Years Professional Status (EYPS), eight are Montessori trained, nine have other appropriate childcare training and nine are unqualified.

Summary and conclusion.

The Gower School Nursery is very well managed with strong leadership and appropriately trained staff who work together effectively as a team. The environment has been very cleverly designed to make the best possible use of both the inside and outside areas, and provides a wealth of excellent high quality resources attractively arranged within easy reach of the children.

The staff have many excellent training opportunities both internally and on external courses and training for parents is also well organised with opportunities to attend regular workshops on Montessori practice.

The rooms for the children under two-and-a-half years old and the older group in Les Papillons are currently the highlight of the school and demonstrate excellent Montessori

practice, with children purposefully engaged, happily developing their independence and using their freedom to pursue their own interests. Les Petits Souris and the younger group within Les Papillons also have some good opportunities to develop independence through free choice of activities but this is more limited because the timetabled activities cut into the cycle of work.

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 further development is needed in the following areas:

- Extend the work cycle for the children over two-and-a-half years old, arrange free flow access for all age groups (except the babies), extending the classroom activities to the outside area, and where possible allow singing, stories and planned activities to take place in the classroom area for those children interested, leaving the remainder free to choose their own activities.
- Amend the job descriptions to give a better picture of a Montessori classroom to help staff, including lunch-time staff, have a more accurate idea of the school's expectations.
- Rethink the short-term planning for the children over two-and-a-half years old to make it less prescriptive. Any activity planning should run across the age groups within each room allowing for differentiation and extending the opportunities for vertical grouping. Make full use of the final column on the Montessori apparatus records to show how the activity has been extended.
- Reposition the computer in Les Papillons to ensure it does not distract other children, encourage staff to use the correct pronouns when referring to themselves and encourage the children in Les Lapins to choose their own food and pour their own drinks at break time.

Philosophy: The senior staff are fully committed to developing Montessori practice within the nursery. The school's philosophy is clearly defined in the new prospectus and there is much helpful information on the website although this does need updating. The Montessori ethos is clearly evident in the various rooms, where the children are happy and relaxed and generally able to confidently choose their own activities.

Curriculum:

Each room provides detailed plans for their own room. For the three to five year old children, there are long-term plans for topics and very good plans which link topics to EYFS curriculum areas. In addition there are rather prescriptive daily plans, which include the number of the week as well as set activities, rather than enabling the children to follow their individual needs. Planning is separate for each age group within each room and in Les Petits Souris the children work in separate groups

according to their age for some planned activities, rather than working together using plans which allow for differentiation. The well-planned garden is much enjoyed by the children and areas of decking provide excellent opportunities for both work and play. Detailed records of children's attainment and progress are maintained and these are effectively used to inform the planning, although currently the final column on the Montessori records for extensions is not being fully completed.

Resources and materials: All the rooms are well organised, tidy and attractively arranged with high quality resources and furniture appropriately chosen for the each age group. In Les Papillons, the computer causes a distraction because of its position. The outside play area is also very well designed with a covered area, decking, two Astroturf areas, a quiet place for contemplation, holes to dig and a good selection of outside play resources.

Staffing:

The Principal and Head of Nursery show strong leadership, the staff structure is clear and good teamwork is evident in all the rooms. Arrangements for induction and staff training are excellent. One non-Montessori trained staff member has received in-house sessions on practical life and Montessori philosophy, as well as training in food hygiene, key person, heuristic play, first aid and Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) within her first year of employment. Job descriptions are very detailed, although there is little mention of Montessori and statements in the Room Leader and Montessori Teachers' job descriptions state that staff must ensure that they keep to the daily timetable. There are weekly meetings for room leaders and senior staff. Items from the action plan are then efficiently relayed to the other staff at weekly room meetings. The Head of Nursery observes staff and feeds back at appraisal time effectively encouraging staff development. The setting's own cook and her assistant prepare well-balanced vegetarian lunches and teas daily, catering for any special requirements.

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

There are many good opportunities for children to develop independence and freedom throughout the age range, although the timetabled activities in some rooms interfere with the children's freedom of choice for part of the session. The staff show respect to the children, but some of the lunch-time staff are less familiar with Montessori practice, and others lead children to the shelves by the hand, rather than allowing the children to take the initiative. However the senior staff are continuing to work on this with in-service training. The children are friendly and polite, showing respect for adults and the environment. The parents attend workshops on how to continue the Montessori approach at home, which gives the children further good opportunities to develop independence.



Montessori practice: *classroom management*

Older children in Les Papillons enjoy a two-and-a-half hour work cycle and this works very well. Although routines are in place for les Petits Poussins, Les Nounours and Les Petits Lapins these are appropriate as they are very relaxed and flexible. The younger group in Les Papillons and Les Petits Souris follow more rigid timetables, which inhibits the children's freedom of choice and independence for part of the session. The children are vertically grouped within limits but the daily planned activities are by age group.

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

Daily routines are effectively organised to ensure that children are safe, their environment is well maintained and the administration is efficient and well-run. The Nursery's relationship with parents is excellent with newsletters, regular reports on children's progress, training in Montessori practice, parents' evenings and activities to attend such as Sports Day.