



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) and subsequent 2012 revisions. 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.

Iverna Gardens Montessori

Armenian Church Hall, Iverna Gardens, London W8 6TP

Dates of the accreditation visits:

Visit 1: 16 March 2012

Visit 2: 24 May 2012

This accreditation report relates to the provision for children aged two and a half to five years.

Description of the school

Iverna Gardens Montessori School opened in 1988, and operates from the ground and lower ground floors of a church hall in a quiet residential street in the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea. Children attending come from the local area.

The school has the use of a kitchen, an office area, bathroom facilities and an enclosed outdoor play area, as well as the large church hall and a basement room.

Iverna Gardens is registered for 40 children from two years six months to five years old. There are currently 73 children on roll. It is open Monday to Friday, from 9.00 to 15.30 during school term times. The morning sessions end at mid-day and the afternoon sessions begin at 13.00 (some children stay for lunch and all day). The school offers French, drama and music as extracurricular activities. A summer school is offered for two weeks in July. The school supports children with learning difficulties as well as children who speak English as an additional language.

There are eight members of staff, of whom seven hold a Montessori qualification and one has a PGCE. The head is currently working towards an Early Years Foundation degree. She shares her time between both nurseries.



Summary and conclusion

Iverna Gardens Montessori Nursery offers a curriculum in line with Montessori philosophy. The outstanding team work and well qualified staff provide a supportive and interesting early learning environment for children from two and a half years to five years old. The child-led activities and the staff team's commitment to promoting their independence during the work cycle give the children opportunities to develop at their own rate. The animals and plants in the school are a wonderful addition to an already rich environment. The staff are open and willing to change if it is for the benefit of the children.

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:

- To continue working on the re-organization of the free flow into the garden and give the children longer periods of time outside.
- To continue to work on consolidating the record system and making appropriate links with the new Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) curriculum.

Philosophy:

Adherence to the Montessori philosophy is the foundation of the children's learning at Iverna Gardens Montessori. The staff provide the children with a safe and stimulating prepared environment and give them the freedom to explore and learn at their own pace, developing concentration and confidence. Through observation and changing the materials the staff are able to follow the child and give them the opportunity to develop their unique potential by allowing them to follow their inner needs and embrace spontaneous learning.

Excellent contact with the parents contributes to the staff's ability to promote the children's learning and development.

The staff are excellent role models and have high expectations of the children's behaviour, giving them the opportunity to learn to respect themselves, the environment and each other and to develop self discipline.

The short daily meetings and the longer weekly meetings help keep the staff well informed about all aspects of the nursery.

The aim of the school – as mentioned on the website and in the prospectus – is to develop confident, happy children who are able to work independently. There are extensive and comprehensive written policies and procedures in place to ensure that the aims and objectives are understood and adhered to by all those involved with the nursery and daily routines are clear.

Learning and Development:

The six areas of learning are comprehensively covered by an excellent range of child-focused Montessori and other materials and activities in the main classroom. The materials are changed to coincide with project work and children's interests, and include an emphasis on culture. The



school has invested a lot of time and resources re-equipping the literacy area very effectively. The shelves are very well organised and the materials are in clearly defined areas that are maintained by the staff. The pretty paved outside area is also very well equipped with relevant activities.

The efficient staff rota ensures that the adults know their responsibilities and any changes to them. The children enjoy self-initiated individual activity, spontaneous small groups and those activities that are adult-led. The school offers music, drama and French in addition to the Montessori curriculum, which take place at the end of the morning

The process of planning, recording and assessment for each individual child (through observations and record keeping) gives the staff the tools to support the children so that each can realise his or her full potential, but this process needs consolidating. The profile is organised into the relevant areas of learning as identified in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). The rest of the children's records and end of term reports would also benefit from being mapped to the new EYFS. Effective tracking observations are used to identify the children's needs and interests and longer observations have been recently introduced. The children and the parents are able to access their child's profiles, which contain numerous excellent photographs as well as samples of the children's work. The teachers understand that they are responsible for keeping the children's records up to date, identifying areas for planned learning and sharing information with all staff members.

Iverna Gardens Montessori offers an inclusive, nurturing environment and both integration and inclusion are effective. The staff support children with learning difficulties and English as an additional language (EAL), involving outside agencies when necessary. British Sign Language is used and is part of the function of the school.

Prepared Environment: resources and materials

The large classroom is diligently maintained and prepared according to the principles of Montessori philosophy and has well defined areas of learning. The corners of the classroom are used for different areas of the curriculum, creating intimate and inviting spaces in this large hall. There is an excellent range of resources. The well organised equipment is available to the children throughout the morning and is changed effectively to accommodate the younger children in the afternoon. The materials are systematically laid out and accessible to the children to aid their independent exploration of their environment.

Project work influences the use of the resources, which are changed to keep the environment fresh and interesting and scaffold the children's learning. Projects are also used to promote and encourage cultural diversity.

Respect for the natural environment is promoted through project work and the nature objects that are brought into the classroom. The school gerbils and fish are very popular and the children are keen to look after them. A rota has been established for the parents to bring in fresh flowers which brighten up the environment and give the children an appealing area to work in. The detailed prospectus that the parents receive describes the type of materials available to the children in the school.

During the work cycle the children have access to the very pretty, well resourced outside area. The area has been imaginatively laid out and offers the children opportunities to develop their



gross motor skills as well as enjoy outside exploration.

Children respect their environment, play constructively together and are supported in their learning by the well prepared environment in the main hall. The downstairs area is only used for the children who stay for the whole day for lunch and craft.

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

Comprehensive strategies have been put in place to foster the children's independence. The freedom of movement, children's ability to choose their own activity and explore the favourable environment and the supportive staff all give the children the tools for independent learning, within the confines of the church hall. The teachers have high expectations of behaviour and the children are able to work on their own or as part of a small group, and they prepare and share their snack. This all contributes to the children becoming more independent and fosters respect for themselves and their peers. Role-play is very evidently used to acquire social skills and the children are helped by the sensitive staff to work through their difficulties. Children are taught about the importance of keeping themselves and the environment clean through example and role-play activities.

Since the first visit the snack table has been relocated and china plates and glasses have been introduced. This has given the children the opportunity to respect and use the area more effectively.

The children are directed to new activities when necessary by the well informed adults who offer them a choice of activities and ensure they remain engaged. The children are shown how to handle the materials and equipment and look after their environment. They generally clean and tidy up after themselves.

A high degree of freedom is exercised by the children indoors when using the large hall. The children can now also choose to go outside everyday during the work cycle. The re-organisation of free-flow to the outside area is still in its infancy and the staff are working towards making it run more smoothly and allowing the children to have longer in the garden.

The basement area is now only used for the children's lunch and to do art work in the afternoon.

The parents are introduced to the Montessori approach through information evenings, termly meetings with their child's key person and regular informal meetings with the members of staff, as well as lectures given by the directress and Montessori trained behavioural specialists. The comprehensive website and the parents' handbook all help give an understanding of the Montessori approach to education. The layout of the upstairs environment and the attitude of the teachers are conducive to the children being able to follow their inner needs. The children learn independently, at their own pace, free from unnecessary adult interference during the time that they have an uninterrupted work cycle.

Montessori practice: classroom management

The head is responsible for the organization of the school and the staff have a clear



understanding of their roles and responsibilities.

Each member of the team is allocated a different area of the classroom to look after. The area is changed each term to ensure that a fresh approach is achieved. They are responsible for the children using the area, updating the children's records and maintaining that environment. All the staff are involved in contributing to all the children's record keeping, with the key person having overall responsibility for their key children and upkeep of their records.

The extracurricular activities and morning circle time are now provided for the children at the end of the morning so they have an uninterrupted work cycle every day.

The children that stay for lunch and full days are taken downstairs when the morning children are leaving. The lunch session is well organized. During the afternoon these children do project work downstairs, leaving the large hall for the use of the afternoon children. They also have access to the garden area.

The younger children tend to start at the school in the afternoon as the work cycle is shorter and the staff ratio is higher, and then move to the mornings as places become available. However, younger children join their siblings in the mornings to help provide some element of vertical grouping.

Montessori Practice: links with parents, including reports and records

The very welcoming and friendly atmosphere at Iverna Gardens Montessori is due to the management of the school and the staff. Communication with the parents is excellent. The comprehensive website, parents' handbook and their regular access to their children's key person and child profile ensure that they feel well informed about their children's progress. The parents are able to come into the classroom and are encouraged to have an informal chat with their child's key person. The informative termly meetings are very much appreciated and the newsletters, parents' board and twice yearly reports support this excellent flow of information between home and school. The parents speak very highly of the school and the way that it is run by the management. They are well informed about Montessori philosophy and are able to implement the principles at home.

Short observations of the children are done regularly by all members of staff and longer more detailed observations have been recently introduced. This information contributes to the children's reports. The weekly staff meetings are used as an opportunity to keep everyone updated on the children's progress. Some of the records are kept on computer and backed up daily. The child's profile is concerned mainly with recording the development and activities that the children have undertaken (this consists mainly of short observations and photographs). The tick charts in each curriculum area are updated when necessary and a summary of the children's progress is written up during the meetings. It would be useful if all the reports and records could be laid out under the six areas of learning, the Montessori areas mapped to the new EYFS and the record system consolidated. The staff are currently undertaking training in the revised EYFS and have undertaken to update their record system to meet the new requirements.

Following the recommendation made after the first visit, a system has been put in place that shows staff how many children are in the building at any one time. Comprehensive risk assessments are carried out daily and one member of staff is allocated each day to check the environment and that food brought into the school doesn't contain allergens.

**Staffing:**

Strong leadership and effective team work is very evident in this nursery. The management team make sure that all staff feel that they are part of a large family. Their commitment to the Montessori approach is clear, with seven members of staff holding a Montessori qualification.

Most of the staff have been recruited following work experience in the school. The staff are excellent at supporting each other and there is a well established system for induction and for monitoring the continued professional development programme. Courses are attended when a need is identified; of these some are provided by the local authority and others are more Montessori based.

The staff roles, such as SENCO, are allocated and relevant courses are attended (with the information gathered cascaded to the rest of the staff).

Staff appraisals are in place. These are effective as they are a shared process and take place once a term. Short staff meetings take place daily to discuss duties for the day and any concerns about a particular child or any matters that may arise. Longer weekly meetings are also scheduled. These are an opportunity for the staff to learn from each other and evaluate their practice. Peer on peer observations have been successfully introduced.

Name of Assessor: Charlotte White

Date of reports:

First visit – 19 March 2012

Second visit – 24 May 2012