



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.

Little Tots Nurseries Ltd

59 Prince of Wales Avenue, Reading, Berks RG30 2UJ

Date of the first accreditation visit: 13 October 2011

Date of second accreditation visit: 29 March 2012

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

Description of the school

Little Tots Nursery opened in 2007. It is privately owned and operates from the ground floor of a 1920s house situated in West Reading. On the ground floor there are two large and bright classrooms, an art room and a role-play area as well as a cloakroom and a spacious fenced garden. The nursery is registered to care for 44 children between the ages of two and eight years. There are currently 110 children on roll aged from 2 to 5 who attend for a variety of sessions; ten per cent stay all day five days a week.

Nursery education funding is available for eligible two and three year olds. The nursery supports children with special educational needs and children who speak English as an additional language. It is open from 08.00 till 18.00 each weekday for 48 weeks of the year.

Thirteen staff work directly with the children, and the two owners regularly work alongside them in the nursery. Six hold relevant Montessori qualifications. One owner/manager has a Montessori Diploma; the other owner is NNEB trained and holds the Montessori Practice Certificate. Some members of the team are NVQ level 3 and 2 trained, and one team member is working towards an Early Years Degree in childcare. There are also four visiting teachers who take the children for cookery, gardening and music sessions.



Summary and conclusion

Little Tots delivers care and education in line with Montessori practices and the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). Assessment and recording of children's learning and development have moved forward since the first visit. This is due to the introduction of a three hour work cycle, continued professional development and changes in the key person system. The school has made significant progress between the two accreditation visits. Further consideration should now be given to the implementation of the document where links between the Montessori and the EYFS curriculum were made. Continued Professional Development (CPD) in relation to Montessori practices and all aspects of assessing and recording children's progress should become embedded in practice. The care given to the children at this setting is highly valued by the parents; this aspect of the practice was highly praised. Opportunities are given to the children to access learning independently both indoors and outdoors. The head and her team show great respect for all those involved with this establishment.

The school provides an education which follows the principles of the Montessori approach and environment. The school has successfully achieved some of 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 provide training, for all staff, in relation to Montessori practices, observations, assessment and recording of children's learning.
- Aim to put into practice the linked record of progress covering the Early Years Foundation Stage/Montessori, in line with "The Guide for the EYFS in Montessori Settings".

Philosophy:

Little Tots nursery aims to offer care and education in line with Montessori practices and the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). Its aims are communicated to parents via a very informative website, newsletters, photograph displays as well as daily contact during dropping off and collection times. A cohesiveness of approach, in the delivery of Montessori practices, is emerging since the first accreditation visit as training has been provided for the whole team. The introduction of an extended work cycle (over three hours) has benefited the children as there is now ample time for them to access learning resources spontaneously both indoors and outdoors. This good practice promotes independence, self-discipline and high self-esteem. Children are trusted to work alone, in pairs, or small groups and for extended periods of time with the activity of their choice. There are opportunities for the children to follow their own path of development with good levels of adult support in the classrooms. Vertical grouping is in place and works well. Children from the age of 2 to under 5 work and play in harmony.

All staff members show deep respect for each other, children and parents. Parents feel welcome and listened to at this setting.



Learning and Development:

The management and the team pride themselves for the care given to the children in this establishment. The parents interviewed praised this aspect of the practice and commented that their children have grown in confidence, independence and self-esteem. The children confidently select and share activities from the low shelves. The staff, indoors, encourage the cycle of activity; this should follow through to the outdoor classroom.

Little Tots Montessori offers a curriculum based on the Montessori approach and the EYFS. The six areas of learning are covered through a range of Montessori materials and other early years resources. Each child is treated as an individual and given opportunities to follow their own path of development. Following recommendations from the first visit a new method of assessment and recording of children's progress as well as identification of next steps of learning has been introduced. Staff are becoming more confident with these procedures. However, as a new record card has been recently introduced, time is needed for this good practice to become embedded. Observations are in place and extensively utilised. These should be evaluated and used to plan next steps of learning. It would be beneficial if children's interests and the outdoor classroom form an integral part of the overall planning.

A 'child profile', containing samples of work, photographic evidence and observations, is kept up to date by each child's key person. This is sent home once a term, and parents welcome this initiative as it gives them an insight into the activities undertaken by their child at the setting.

Unlimited access to the secure garden, visits to the allotment and forest school site provides the children with opportunities to explore and investigate different environments and extend their knowledge and understanding of the world they live in. This area of the curriculum could be further enhanced if sustained shared thinking were to take place during outdoor play.

Prepared Environment: resources and materials

The two large classrooms provide the children with access to a range of complete and appealing Montessori materials and other learning resources. The curriculum is organized into distinct areas of learning in accordance with Montessori practices. Consideration has been given to the ages and stages of development of all children attending. This is reflected in the activities on offer. The didactic materials are well displayed, accessible to the children at all times and sufficient for the number attending.

The spacious fenced garden is well equipped with large apparatus to promote and enhance physical skills. Adults ensure children's safety by adjusting the ratios as the children flow freely indoors and out. Planting, artwork and opportunities to take activities from the classroom outdoors ensure that all the six areas of learning are covered. Children relish the free access to the outdoor classroom.

The roles of adults are defined in relation to their positioning in the environment and responsibilities to the children and their families. A key person system is in place but the staff work with all children.



Montessori practice: independence

Following the first visit the work cycle has been extended. This good practice provides the children with ample opportunities to access learning independently, indoor and outdoors, and to work and play for extended periods of time with their chosen activity. The children relish the trust placed in them and fully explore the environment of their choice. There is a high degree of respect amongst the children – they share, take turns and help each other – and adults act as good role models. The cycle of activity is followed indoors. For continuity of provision this practice should also become embedded outdoors.

The rolling snack, which is closely supervised by an adult, provides the children with opportunities to cater for their own needs and to extend some practical life skills as they help in its preparation, as well as washing, drying and putting away their plates and cups. This experience is much enjoyed by all. To further enhance the high degree of independence given to the children the management might give consideration to promoting this aspect of the Montessori practice at home. The parents interviewed would welcome this opportunity.

Extracurricular activities are offered, but none took place on the day of the visit; however, according to the management, children are not obliged to join.

Montessori practice: classroom management

The classrooms are well managed. There are procedures in place to ensure that children are kept safe. Staff are always nearby to give support should it be needed. Children have the freedom to access learning spontaneously both in the classrooms, role-play area and outdoors. The rolling snack is well supervised. Vertical grouping is in place and works well at this setting due to the free flow and the high standard of care given to each child. The children benefit from a number of extracurricular activities, such as visits to the allotment, forest school site and woodwork.

Qualified staff are now responsible for the assessment and recording of children's learning. This practice was put in place following discussions with the head and her team after the first visit. Due to the implementation of a new record-keeping system there has been an improvement in the assessment and recording of children's progress. However, for consistency of approach to emerge, time is needed for the new documentation to become embedded in practice. The team worked hard to produce a document linking the EYFS and the Montessori curriculum. This is in line with "The Guide to the EYFS in Montessori Settings". It would be good practice if this document could now be put into use.

Continued professional development, in relation to Montessori philosophy and practices, were put in place. Workshops, given by an external tutor, were attended by all. A mentoring system has also been implemented. A qualified member of the team mentors non-Montessori staff. These changes have strengthened practice and with time a cohesiveness of approach will emerge.



Montessori Practice: links with parents, including reports and records

The setting has very good links with parents. The open door policy, accessibility of staff and management, and availability of their child's record (child profile) gives parents a good insight into this establishment's practice. The parents interviewed are very appreciative of the care given to their child by every member of the team and the opportunities they have to share in the school's life. They participate during festival celebrations, sports day, cookery sessions and ladies night. The comprehensive website, photos around the setting and daily exchange of information ensures that this partnership is strong. This area of practice is good.

The parents are aware of their child's key person and are able to form strong links with them. The key person has the responsibility for updating of the child's profile, which is shared with parents three times a year. The staff are aware of their roles and responsibilities in relation to assessment, recording and updating of information. Due to staff training and the change in the key person system this aspect of practice has moved forward.

A comprehensive report is written for every child before they move to the next school. The format used is provided by the local authority and covers all the six EYFS areas of learning. The information is shared with the parents before the document is sent to the new school.

Staffing:

There are clear staffing procedures on display, and they are understood and followed by all. Thirteen staff work directly with the children. The owners work alongside their team, in the classrooms, for three days a week. Six staff members hold the relevant Montessori qualifications and the others are NVQ 2 and 3 trained. One member of the team is working towards and Early Years Degree in childcare.

Continued professional development, put in place since the first accreditation visit, has led to a more consistent approach on how each child's learning and development is followed at this setting. Peer observation and robust induction procedures now need to become embedded to further strengthen the good practice that is emerging. New job descriptions are in place and relevant to the adult roles. Staff meetings take place every six weeks. A wide agenda is covered and there are opportunities for all stakeholders to contribute to the process.

The management and her team embrace the Montessori philosophy. Positive changes made since the first assessment visit have strengthened all aspects of this practice.

Name of Assessor: Rosie Roberts
Date of reports: 09th of April 2012
First visit – 13th of October 2011
Second visit – 29th of March 2012