

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. It considers how far the school follows the criteria set out in “The Guide to the EYFS in Montessori Settings”.

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.

St Andrew’s Montessori

St Andrew’s Church, Thornhill Square, Islington, London N1 1BQ

Date of accreditation visit 30 November 2009

The accreditation report assesses the Montessori practice offered to 2½ to 5 year olds in this setting

Description of the school:

St Andrew’s Montessori Nursery opened in 1998 and is privately owned and run by Little Acorn Nursery School Trust. It operates in a church that is divided into five or six classroom areas according to need. There is access to a smaller hall, kitchen, office and toilet facilities and a fully enclosed outdoor play area. The school is located in the residential area of Thornhill in the London Borough of Islington.

The nursery is open for 33 weeks of term time for full day, morning, and afternoon sessions from Monday to Thursday. Morning sessions are from 8.45 to 12.00 and the afternoon sessions are from 13.00 to 15.00; full day sessions are 8.45 to 15.00. The children who attend full day sessions have lunch at nursery. On Fridays parents are invited to spend the morning with their children at the nursery.

The school is registered for 56 children from two and a half to six year olds and currently has forty-nine children on the roll. Children come from a wide catchment area. The nursery supports children with learning difficulties or disabilities and also children who speak English as an additional language.

The nursery employs eight members of staff including the Principal and Head of Nursery. All eight staff hold Montessori diplomas, with the Principal holding an advanced Montessori Diploma.

Summary and conclusion.

The staff at St Andrew’s Montessori are fully committed to the Montessori philosophy. This is reflected in the children’s excellent behavior and degree of independence. The dedication of the staff and good classroom management contribute to a happy and well prepared environment. St Andrew’s provides the children with an wide range of good quality materials of which the majority are Montessori and which are accessible and attractive to the children.

The school works in partnership with its parents and the cohesive relationship with staff is reflected in the strong management team and the happy atmosphere.

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 :

- The children should have free-flow access to the outside area.
- Develop a specific snack area to facilitate individual snack.
- Provide more materials for the younger children.
- Consolidate and evaluate the children's records.
- Minute all staff meetings.

Philosophy:

All the staff at St Andrew's school have an excellent understanding of Montessori philosophy and promote it very successfully. The principles, goals and philosophy are discussed at weekly staff meetings and are shared effectively with the parents through the prospectus, and very comprehensive contact. The web-site is going to be updated to include the policies, principles goals and philosophy, which are at the moment defined in writing for the parents and staff.

Observation is the key to the school's promotion of a safe, happy and caring environment. By creating a stimulating, nurturing learning environment, the staff are able to follow the children and enable them to fulfill their unique potential. The staff give the children opportunities to make their own choices, and promote independence. They are unobtrusive and guide the children to new activities when necessary. Due to the interesting and very well-structured environment the children are able to make decisions for themselves, helping to develop their own self discipline and respect for each other.

The school has an excellent relationship with its parents who feel very involved with their children's learning and development. They are encouraged to spend time with their children in the nursery and so have a good understanding of the Montessori principles and philosophy.

Learning and Development:

The staff at St. Andrew's school are confident with their observations, recording and planning, and adherence to the Montessori philosophy. The school has a 2½ hour work cycle in the morning. The staff use the Montessori curriculum for long term planning and use observations for medium and short term planning. The planning takes into account the EYFS and the National Curriculum.

Teachers adjust their planning to take into consideration the needs of their key children.

Photographs and observations are used to record children's achievements in their child profile books with examples of their work. The children are based in their own particular area with their key person but are free to move around the whole of the indoor environment and select activities from any area to use. All the different areas of learning are clearly defined and divided into activity areas such as role-play, book area and creative areas as well as the Montessori curriculum areas. They are well presented and the children enjoy many opportunities for spontaneous learning through the unobtrusive, very well-prepared indoor environment and sensitive support of staff. During the accreditation visit the outside area was used in the afternoon by the older children.

The learning and development of the younger children would benefit from a wider range of activities specifically targeted for this age group.

The parents are able to spend Friday mornings learning with their children in the classroom and are therefore able to contribute to planning in the response to their children's developmental needs.

As the key worker maintains an overview of the children's development they are able to work closely with the SENCO sharing ideas on how to support children with learning difficulties.

Prepared Environment: resources and materials

The nursery is based in a very spacious church and is bright, in spite of the fact that there is very little natural light. It is clean and very well laid out with plenty of space for the children to work on the floor or at a table, in small groups or on their own.

The quantity and quality of the resources are excellent for the older age group but the youngest children would benefit from more resources appropriate to their age, such as heuristic play or treasure baskets designed to support their language development. The environment is well planned and prepared by all the members of staff. The rooms are systematically laid out and orderly, and the materials are complete and appealing and accessible to children. The indoor space is very well used and there is a sufficient quantity of materials for several children to work on at any one time. Although each member of staff is responsible for their part of the classroom, all areas and resources are checked regularly. The wide range of well-maintained Montessori and other materials are generally age-appropriate and are accessible to all the children in the nursery. The outside area is enclosed and is used for nature walks and other group activities.

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

The children display a high level of independence which is facilitated by easily accessible Montessori and other relevant materials systematically arranged in different easily reached areas in the school. The children are trusted to move around the whole school on their own to collect their chosen activities. There are many opportunities for the children to develop their independence and they tidy and clean the classroom without being asked.

The children have unrestricted time to choose and complete an activity with plenty of

opportunities to choose whether to work individually or as part of a small group. The children respect each other and their work, and the adults understand their role as facilitators of learning and therefore do not impinge on the children's freedom. They encourage the children to experiment, explore and repeat activities. The children are encouraged to take turns and share and are polite and confident when talking to visitors. The adults work well together to ensure that the children's routines are predictable and consistent. The children's choices should be extended by offering periods of free-flow between the inside and outside areas.

The children are able to choose what they have for their snack time which is available in the middle of the morning. They take their snack back to their own area to eat with their own groups. To further facilitate independence the children would benefit from a snack area with free access from early in the morning for all children by providing "individual snack" using glass and china utensils.

The school has a very strong link with its parents through newsletters, fund raising and inviting them in on Fridays to spend the morning with their children. This helps promote independence at home and a good understanding of the Montessori philosophy. The parents very much value the time they spend with their children in the classroom.

Montessori practice: classroom management

The staff have a good understanding of the concept of the work cycle, which is about 2½ hours long. The children are grouped with their key worker by age but are free to move around the school as they choose. All the children have access to the whole Montessori curriculum. The older children have more advanced materials in their room but are free to move around the indoor environment as they choose and the younger children are able to access the more advanced materials if they need to. Presentations are generally done by the children's key workers but they are able to work with other members of staff as well. This was very evident as one member of staff was ill and her key children were integrated effectively into other groups. Although the children generally returned to their own area with their work they also worked with other members of staff in different areas.

Planning is done for each individual child by their key worker and therefore they have an excellent understanding of their children's needs. Consequently there are opportunities for spontaneous learning. Extracurricular activities are managed within the school and within the work cycle.

The teamwork is excellent, which helps the key worker system to operate effectively as children feel secure and happy and the staff know their children well and also have a good relationship with their parents.

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

The key person is responsible for keeping all the children's records up to date and the records are shared with the management on a regular basis. The records are kept secure in a locked filing cabinet for confidentiality. The children's profile includes photographs, observations and the child's own work. The Montessori curriculum has been mapped onto the EYFS and each child is assessed and records updated on a regular basis. Reports are written for the parents

by the key persons on a weekly and termly basis. The prospectus is very informative about the school and the Montessori method and the procedures and policies are available in the office for the parents to read.

St Andrew's has developed a very strong link with its parents who are kept informed by notices, newsletters, website and the three-quarter of an hour opportunity to spend with their own child in the school on Fridays. There are also parent meetings and reports and if needed daily contact with relevant staff and management. The parents are well aware of who their child's key worker is.

The staff provide the child's next school with a transition summary document to ensure that the child's developmental needs are met.

Staffing:

All the staff at the school have had Montessori training and are dedicated to their job and show commitment to the Montessori approach and philosophy. One member of staff is undertaking a Montessori foundation degree and another is doing a four month update for her degree. All members of staff hold first aid certificates and are aware of safeguarding procedures. The management is committed to ongoing professional development and actively encourages their staff to undertake at least one day's training each term.

All the staff are aware of any of the children's dietary needs. Details are given to all the staff any training implemented and there is a list on the wall in the kitchen.

Annual staff appraisals give the staff an opportunity to review their job descriptions. This ensures that the staff are able to communicate with the management in addition to a regular meeting when all the staff are able to contribute to the agenda although minutes are not taken. Many of the staff have attended the school as students so have had a very extensive induction process.

All the staff work very well as a team and obviously enjoy working together. They show respect for each other and the children and are very willing to help one another. They are very professional and they generate a very calm atmosphere for the children to work in. The strong team work would be further enhanced by the manager keeping written notes of staff meetings. Fund raising for the school is done termly and all the staff are involved in allocating funds for new equipment and materials.

The leadership is strong and there is evidence of excellent team work and all these elements contribute to good Montessori practice within the school

Name of Assessor

Date of report

Charlotte White

30th November 2009