

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.

Star Child Montessori Day Nursery

Wiltshire Road Hall (next to No 20), Wiltshire Road, Thornton Heath
Surrey CR7 7QN

Date of accreditation visit: 19 February 2010

The accreditation report assesses the Montessori Practice offered to 2 to 5 year olds in this setting

Description of the school:

Star Child Montessori Day Nursery, which opened in September 2004, is situated in converted church hall buildings in a mainly residential area. The buildings are used solely by the nursery, which provides full day care, Monday to Friday 51 weeks a year. The nursery is open 7:30 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. Breakfast club, after-school care and holiday clubs are also provided.

The nursery is registered for 91 early years aged children, of whom 28 may be aged less than 2 years. Currently on roll are 90 children who attend for a variety of days or parts of days. The majority of children attend for full days. 16 children speak English as a second language.

This accreditation visit assessed the Montessori practice offered to the 2 to 5 year olds in the two pre-school rooms, which are well organised and staffed by welcoming and enthusiastic practitioners.

The owner/manager is in attendance full-time as is the named deputy but they are not included in the adult:child ratios.

Staff hold, or are working towards, a variety of Montessori and non-Montessori early years qualifications. In the pre-school rooms five members of staff hold a Montessori Level 4 qualification, one has a Level 3 Early Childhood qualification and the remaining two are working towards or registered to start Level 3 Early Childhood qualifications.

Summary and conclusion.

Star Child Montessori Day Nursery provides a welcoming environment for the children in its care. The committed and enthusiastic staff provides a good range of experiences within a well-structured environment. Good planning and teamwork contribute to the organised atmosphere. Children show good standards of behaviour and social skills, and develop independence and freedom. Parents comment favourably on their relationships with staff and the information and support they are given.

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. Further development is needed in the following areas:

- develop the outside area, to enhance learning and to provide a range of experiences complementing those in the inside Montessori classroom;
- reviewing the methods of record keeping should be considered, in order to enhance the Montessori records and to integrate Montessori and EYFS information; and
- consider ways of extending the freedom given to children as to where to work.

Philosophy:

Star Child has a caring atmosphere, due to its committed and enthusiastic staff. It provides a well organised environment in which the children are happy and confident.

The application of the Montessori philosophy is evident throughout the setting and the two pre-school rooms work well together to provide a consistent approach for the children. Montessori-trained staff support others in understanding and applying the approach, the excellent teamwork being key to the success of this. Regular staff meetings and training days ensure that the application of the philosophy is discussed and reviewed regularly.

Parents have regular access to information about the Montessori philosophy and method via the prospectus, newsletters and parents forums. Parents are keen to be part of their children's experience and are supportive of the events held.

The setting has created a well-thought out environment for the children that provides good opportunities for learning and development. Thorough planning and record-keeping ensure that the environment and resources are used to the best effect, and that each child's individual needs are met.

Staff are aware of the importance of, and are confident in, allowing the children to lead the way and trust them to do so. They follow the child allowing the independence, respect and freedom of each to develop.

Learning and Development:

Planning is thorough, and takes into account the needs of individual children. Planning includes both the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) and Montessori materials, ensuring that children have a variety of experiences.

Long-term planning is shared for the whole setting, short-term planning is then personalised for each classroom and is flexible within the long-term plan. The Montessori and creative classrooms (the two pre-school rooms) plan activities separately, with all members of staff taking an active part.

Individual plans take the needs of each child into account. These are based on observations which are clearly recorded, although the Montessori checklists used are very basic, and would benefit from being enhanced. They are discussed by the two key persons, one from each of the Montessori and Creative rooms. It would be appropriate to review the planning to devise a method combining the Montessori and EYFS areas. Individual plans are regularly checked and discussed by a senior member of staff.

The setting has a good relationship with the area SENCo, who gives additional support when required.

Children (who are vertically grouped from 2½ years) spend half the day in the Montessori classroom and the other half in the creative classroom. In each room the routine is the same.

The work cycle is used effectively, and children are given the opportunity to follow their interests. There is an expectation in both the Montessori and creative classrooms that the cycle of activity will be followed and children are supported in their efforts to develop independence. Staff encourage the children and ensure that appropriate activities are available.

Children understand the work cycle and what is expected of them. They are happy in their work and in the environment. They are supported well when required, but are encouraged to develop independence. They relate well to the staff at the setting, who model good behaviour and attitudes.

Free-flow between the inside and outside is restricted to the last half hour of the work cycle. Expectations in the outside area are the same as indoors.

Prepared Environment: resources and materials

The Montessori classroom provides a well laid-out, inviting Montessori prepared environment for the children to work in. There is space for the children to work on tables or on the floor, for which mats are easily accessible. Staff are allocated to tables, and children are encouraged, although not required, to work at their key worker's table.

The materials are well-organised, with distinct areas of learning. Shelves are labelled with photos as well as words.

There are a suitable quantity and range of materials in each area, with the cultural area being particularly well-stocked. Montessori materials are complemented by other materials which

have been carefully chosen to extend learning.

Materials are generally well cared for, although incomplete materials should be removed from the shelves. They are kept clean and tidy, and are appropriate for the age and needs of the children. Staff demonstrate respect for the materials, ensuring that they are kept tidy and are returned to the shelves, and there is an expectation that the children will do the same.

The outside area is currently only resourced by bikes and climbing apparatus. This area has the potential to provide an excellent outdoor Montessori classroom, which would also act as a conduit between the Montessori and creative classrooms. Planning is already underway to improve the facilities offered, and the opportunity should be taken to extend the range of facilities and to view the process from a Montessori learning environment aspect.

The creative room is laid out in a similar way to the Montessori classroom. Distinct working areas are evident and materials have a place, to which children are expected to return them. Staff and children treat materials with respect.

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

Star Child provides good Montessori practice in both pre-school rooms. Staff have high, consistent expectations of the children to which the children respond positively.

Staff are confident in their use of the work cycle, allowing children to take the lead, to show their interests and wishes in the materials they choose to work with, and for what period of time. They provide a good level of encouragement for the children, encouraging them to be independent but supporting them where necessary. This allows them to judge and to respond to the needs of all children. They interact well with the children, who respond with trust and openness.

Staff have designated areas to supervise, both inside and outside. These are structured to ensure the safety and well-being of the children, although this sometimes restricts the choice of the children as to where to work inside, as they are encouraged to work in the vicinity of their key worker.

The children are secure in their environment. They are confident with the adults and know what is expected of them. They show enthusiasm about the activities available to them and independently complete the cycle of activity. They develop independence and respect for themselves, others and the environment.

Snack time is for a set period of a half hour during the work cycle, although the choice as to whether and when to join in is left with the children. Similarly, the extra-curricular activities offered (French and Music) are timetabled but children do not have to attend if they do not wish to.

Informal communication with parents on a daily basis, coupled with more formal presentations at parents forums and in the regular newsletter, encourage parents to extend their child's learning outside the setting.

Montessori practice: classroom management

Adults have a group of key children, with whom they have responsibility for updating records and liaising with parents. All adults, however, take responsibility for all children and this further encourages good teamwork.

The work cycle is 2 hours inside, with a further half hour when the children can choose to work inside or outside. The two pre-school classrooms both have direct access to the outside area, so it would be possible to develop this free-flow inside/outside further.

The children understand the work cycle and concentrate well during this period. Activities are offered which are appropriate to individual children or to the planned topic. Children's choice of where to work is sometimes compromised as key workers expect them to work on tables with them. It would be worthwhile to consider whether the children would benefit from this restriction being lifted.

Adult duties are organised well, and all staff are clear about their responsibilities in the classroom. They know their key children well and present new materials when they feel that a child is ready and receptive. Presentations are confidently completed and children are given the choice as to whether to continue or not.

Extra-curricular activities are not pressed upon children if they do not wish to go.

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

Staff feel part of a team at Star Child. They have distinct responsibilities, both within the classroom and relating directly to the children. They understand the importance of health and safety and safeguarding issues.

The key person role is shared between two members of staff, one from the Montessori classroom and the other from the Creative classroom. Record-keeping is a joint activity, and all take responsibility for the child. Written reports are issued to parents annually in the summer term, and to primary schools when the child moves on. The key workers also report to parents at parents evenings twice a year and liaise informally on a daily basis.

All members of staff are involved in the liaison with parents. Parents speak highly of the relationship they have with the staff and value the information they receive. General information is disseminated via newsletters and emails, and photos/plans on noticeboards give parents a view of what their children are involved in at the setting.

Staffing:

The staff structure, which has recently been reviewed, is simple and effective. Lines of communication and responsibilities are clear, and all staff are aware of them. Staff work extremely effectively as a team, which results in a positive and welcoming atmosphere.

All staff, whether Montessori-trained or not, actively promote the Montessori ethos of the setting, and uphold the principles throughout their working practices. They have a comprehensive induction programme on joining the setting, and performance assessments are

held annually.

The owner/manager holds Level 4 Montessori qualifications for Early Years and Elementary age groups. The named deputy holds a Montessori Early Years Level 4 qualification and is currently studying for Early Years Practitioner Status (EYPS).

Staff in the pre-school rooms holds a variety of qualifications. Five members of staff hold a Montessori Early Years Level 4 qualification, one has a Level 3 Early Childhood qualification and the remaining two are working towards or registered to start Level 3 Early Childhood qualifications.

All-staff training is held approximately twice a year, the content of which is dependent on perceived need. Many members of staff are studying for relevant qualifications, many funded by Train to Gain. Other specific training, which has been primarily EYFS-based over the past two years, is sourced as appropriate from the local authority. Further Montessori-based training should be kept high on the agenda, given the number of non-Montessori trained staff.

Budgeting is primarily the responsibility of the owner/manager and her deputy, although staff are invited to inform them of resources which they feel would enhance the learning environment.

Carolyn Crowe
Name of Assessor:

21 February, 2010
Date of report: