



# **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.

### **The Nursery and Reception classes at St Nicholas Preparatory School**

23-24 Princes Gate, London SW7

Dates of the accreditation visits:

Visit 1: 29 February 2012

Visit 2: 15 May 2012

This accreditation report relates to the provision for children aged 2 years 9 months to five years old.

#### **Description of the school:**

Montessori St Nicholas Nursery and Reception Classes (Foundation Years) are part of a larger independent preparatory school occupying two listed buildings overlooking Hyde Park. All 109 three to five year old children attending the three nursery and three reception classes benefit from the school facilities which include hall, lunch room and library. The school has use of a large communal garden at the rear of the school building. One of the nursery classes and one reception class have direct access to the garden. The school is open during term times Monday to Friday from 8.30 to 15.00 and offers a holiday club during the summer break.

The nursery and reception classes are registered for 113 children of whom approximately 80 are in receipt of the nursery grant. They offer part- and full-time provision during term time only. The nursery and reception classes welcome children with Special Education Needs (SEN) and English as an Additional Language (EAL), who benefit from specialist in house support. There are 17 members of staff working directly with the children; currently 14 hold a Montessori Diploma and three hold other appropriate education qualifications. Strong support from parents both at home and more formally through the parents’ association, known as the Friends, makes this a really thriving learning community.



## **Summary and recommendations**

St. Nicholas Montessori Nursery and Reception classes provide a calm and supportive early learning environment for children from two years and nine months to five years old in two large converted houses in Kensington. The outstanding team work, well qualified staff and the strong commitment to the Montessori philosophy make for a high quality early years education and give children strong foundations as they progress on to the Preparatory School. The child-led activities, purposeful learning and development and an obvious commitment to promoting children's independence during the work cycle ensures a happy, constructive and nurturing environment.

***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:***

- continue to develop recording systems, particularly in view of the implementation of the revised EYFS in September 2012, incorporating longer observations, tracking of children as well as examples of children's work and parental contributions;
- continue to consider the possibilities of combining the nursery and reception children into EYFS classrooms; and
- Following performance management meetings prepare a table of suitable courses and training to support professional development of all Foundation Years teachers.

### **Philosophy:**

The happy, stimulating and safe environment promotes a calm, relaxed and harmonious atmosphere for the children to work in, with a strong emphasis on supporting the children's independence during the work cycle. The nursery's commitment to the Montessori philosophy is stated in the school's recently revised prospectus.

The parents are encouraged to contribute to their children's learning and progress through the child's *Yellow Profile Book*. The staff establish a good working relationship with the children's parents and carers through home visits, the Parents' Association, information evenings, profile mornings and the verbal feedback exchanged when the children come into school.

The well equipped classrooms, attractively displayed materials, and the effective use of free flow into the garden during the work cycle ensure that the children are able to follow their inner needs. They have the opportunity to develop self discipline and take control of their learning in the well prepared environment throughout the three hour work cycle.

All staff are aware of their responsibilities and the comprehensive and extensive written policies and procedures in place ensure that the aims and objectives are understood and adhered to by all those involved with the nursery. The calm atmosphere, engagement between staff and children, and the independence and freedom of choice demonstrated during the work cycle within the prepared environment were extended to lunch time routine of the reception children following recommendations during the first visit.

The excellent management of free flow inside and out in this large premises is testimony to the outstanding team work and dedication of the staff.



### **Learning and Development:**

The EYFS classes of St. Nicholas Preparatory School have an excellent range of well organized and child-focused materials and activities inside and out. These comprehensively cover the six areas of learning which are geared towards meeting the children's developmental needs. The children have plenty of opportunities for spontaneous, uninterrupted learning as well as for adult-led activities.

The majority of the children benefit from effective free-flow into the outside areas which, given the layout of the building, requires skill and co-operation from all the staff.

Planning is done collectively half termly, with each class choosing different topics organised according to the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) areas of learning. Longer evaluated observations and tracking of the children have been introduced as a result of the first visit. This will enhance the planning process and help the staff relate more closely to the children's interests for topic work. Further developments in this area will be required following the implementation of the revised EYFS in September 2012 and therefore this will continue to be the focus of the staff's professional development in the year to come. Good use is made of photographs of the children's learning and achievements particularly as part of the classrooms displays. They facilitate close links between the staff and the parents.

The nursery follows the Montessori curriculum, with close links to the EYFS. A brief tick chart is used to link the Montessori curriculum to the Early Learning Goals. In line with good practice the key person is responsible for all their children's record keeping, and gathering and transferring information which has been generated by other members of staff in each classroom.

The nursery actively supports children who have English as an additional language by close observation and use of a support manager and, when necessary, external specialists. The EAL co-ordinator in the school works with teachers to map language acquisition over the planned topics. Speech and language specialists are in the school twice a week. Educational psychologists, as well as the family are called upon to help support any child with difficulties or additional needs.

### **Prepared Environment: resources and materials**

All the classrooms are well resourced with Montessori and other age and stage relevant early years activities and materials. The classrooms are set up within the guidelines of the Montessori philosophy and the areas of learning are clearly defined. The rooms are well organised and very well equipped, with provision made for repairs of the resources. In addition, there is at least one computer for the children's use in each class; they are used independently and effectively. To further enhance this effective learning environment consideration could be given to the value of the displays (currently at high level) and their contribution to the children's learning.

Children in the nursery and reception class have access to the garden throughout the morning work cycle. The outside area is a shared site and is also used by other people from adjacent buildings. Excellent use is made of the expansive and natural outside space and the children are encouraged to explore much of the area.

The staff have a clear understanding of their role in supporting the children by providing an



enticing environment both inside and out.

### **Montessori practice: independence**

A high level of independence is made possible by a well planned and organised system of children self-registering. The classroom core materials and the activities are accessed easily by the children from child height shelves. The children are encouraged to wash their hands and prepare their own snack, dress and undress themselves. The work cycle during the morning operates around effective free flow into the garden. Children are encouraged to complete each cycle of activity and are given freedom to explore their environment and work at their own pace. The outside area is used effectively and the children are given time to discover it by themselves or they can choose to be involved in adult-led activities.

The *Yellow Profile Book* is used to demonstrate to parents how to follow the Montessori principles at home by showing them photographs of how well the children tidy up, change shoes, and manage their coats and boots. This partnership could be enhanced by promoting the importance of independence to the parents when they arrive in the classroom in the morning and encouraging them to let their children cope with their coats and boots themselves.

The recently changed lunch time routine for the Reception classes has enabled children to practice their newly acquired practical skills.

The children show a high level of mutual respect as they help each other, share well and take turns, put their work away and keep the environment clean. The staff are models of respectful behaviour. Different cultures are explored and festivals are regularly celebrated to encourage a greater awareness. This was well in evidence during the second visit as all classes were engaged in celebrations of the International day, which focused on the countries participating in this year's London Olympics. Children rejoiced in sharing knowledge gained from this project with the assessors. This approach promotes inter-cultural respect and interest and underpins the wide cultural mix of the school

### **Montessori practice: classroom management**

The three hour work cycle starts as soon as children arrive in their class. The younger children (2 years 9 months to 4 years) are in the nursery classes and the older children (4 to 5) are in the reception classes. Individual targets are planned daily for each child within the general planning. These are linked directly with the Montessori curriculum and the EYFS.

Each child has a key person who is responsible for his or her record keeping, observations and liaison with parents. The nursery classes have established effective free-flow between the inside and outside environments. The successful management structure of the classroom and the excellent team work contribute to the harmonious and calm environment for the children. Routines are well embedded within the daily organization and the staff are clear about their daily responsibilities.

Some of the children in the nursery go home at lunch time, while the remainder in the nursery department have lunch in their classrooms. The reception children have lunch in the school hall.



Currently the children are grouped by age. It would be interesting to research the benefits of vertical grouping if this were to be tried.

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

The parents are welcome in the class at any time and are given brief termly reports. These could serve as a source of information for the parents in linking the Montessori method of education to the EYFS. The final end of term report is sent to the child's next school. Parent meetings are a regular feature of the school and the parents are further informed by weekly bulletins. Some parents would like more information on the Montessori approach and the school will continue to promote the already existing focused information evenings. Newsletters are sent out at the end of every half term. The parents have opportunities to liaise with the staff on a daily basis or as the need arises.

The key person is responsible for their children's written observations, evaluating them, forward planning and the updating of the child's *Yellow Profile Book*. This book has photographs, short observations and examples of the child's work which are shared with the parents. Continued consideration should be given to the presentation of these books – as a means of sharing with parents children's ongoing learning and development and to celebrate their experiences at the school. The nursery records are transferred to the reception class with the child.

Further consideration should be given to preparation of termly reports, celebrating each child's achievements and identifying possible areas for development. This has been achieved very successfully in several of the classrooms.

### **Staffing:**

The induction process for new staff is effective. Two members of staff are assigned to each new recruit to cover all areas of the school day. They are responsible for monitoring the quality of their work and guiding them where necessary, while helping them to become well versed in the school routines.

The majority of staff are Montessori trained and work well as a team. They benefit from comprehensive job descriptions, regular staff evaluations and well documented staff meetings. Following the recommendation during the first visit serious consideration has been given to developing a framework for Continued Professional Development. Table of courses and studies will be produced following performance management meetings and staff will be encouraged to participate in a range of courses relevant to their Montessori practice within the school.

The management and leadership are strong. The teamwork and the induction process ensure that the staff feel well supported by their peers. The high standard of care and education provided is in line with Montessori practice and adherence to the EYFS and it is made possible due to the commitment of the school head, and of the staff to the children and their families.

Name of Assessor(s): Charlotte White and Barbara Isaacs

Date of final report: 25 March 2012