



# **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.

### **Victoria Road Montessori**

The Vestry, Christ Church, Victoria Road, London W8 5RQ

Dates of the accreditation visits:

Visit 1: 22 March 2012

Visit 2: 29 May 2012

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

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

Victoria Road Montessori school was registered in 2007, and is a sister school to Iverna Gardens Montessori Nursery and is under the same management. The school operates from the ground floor vestry of a church in a residential area in the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea. The children come from the local area. The setting has use of a small hall with lavatory facilities and an enclosed outdoor play area.

Victoria Road Montessori is registered for a maximum of 16 children from two to five years old and currently has 16 on the roll. It runs morning sessions between the hours of 09.00 and 12.00 and is open during term time only. The school supports children with learning difficulties as well as children who speak English as an additional language.

A team of three staff members work with the children, all of whom hold a Montessori early years qualification. One of the team manages the setting. The head of both nurseries has over 33 years' experience and is currently working towards an Early Years Foundation degree.

#### **Summary and conclusion**

Victoria Road Montessori offers high quality Montessori education for children aged two to five years in a warm and harmonious atmosphere, where children are encouraged to learn and develop through a wide range of activities. The partnerships with parents and external agencies are a key strength of this nursery and ensure all children receive care in line with their individual needs. The welcoming and inclusive environment offers the children



opportunities to benefit from a wide range of stimulating and exciting experiences in both indoor and outdoor environments. All the staff work together to implement changes and provide the best learning environment they can.

***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 carry on working towards consolidating the recording systems and classifying them consistently by linking the Montessori areas of learning with the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), and to include details of the children's interests in the short observations.
- To consider changing the Monday circle time to the end of the morning and giving the children the choice of whether or not to join the timetabled extracurricular activities that take place first thing in the morning.

#### **Philosophy:**

This is a strong area for the school. Parents are provided with excellent access to information about the Montessori philosophy through the informative website, parents' evenings and lectures given by the management. The parents feel that they can follow Montessori practices at home. The principles, goals and philosophy are regularly reviewed and defined in writing; they help promote Montessori practice. The holistic approach of the teachers supports the development of each child and this is promoted by staff planning separately for each child.

After the early morning circle time on Mondays and extracurricular activities on Tuesdays and Thursdays, the two and a half hour work cycle starts and gives the children time to explore their environment, work independently, together, or as part of a larger group as they choose. The school is very well resourced with Montessori and other materials and there is plenty for each child to choose from. They are given time to repeat an exercise should they want to. The staff understand the need to see each child as an individual and they foster respect for the environment and each other through role-play and by being excellent role models themselves.

The role of the adults is well defined in this small setting and each member of staff is well aware of their responsibilities. They are exceptionally good at working together and benefit from having the staff at a larger sister school to share information and expertise with. The parents are very appreciative of the staff and their caring attitude towards the children.

#### **Learning and Development:**

The staff have created an enticing environment, with an excellent range of Montessori and other materials covering the six areas of learning. The resources are well kept and displayed in accordance with Montessori philosophy and housed on accessible shelving. The outside area is charming: the school has use of a paved area around the church, where trees, flowerbeds and a sunny open space make it a very inviting area for the children to use. The children are happy when they arrive and settle quickly and, bearing in mind their age, show a high level of



independence.

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 their potential. However, this system still needs simplifying, as previously recommended. The staff are currently undergoing training in the new EYFS and will change their record keeping system using the new government guide lines. The profile is currently organized into the relevant areas of learning as identified in the EYFS, but all the records for each child could be brought together and could be classified more consistently by linking the Montessori areas of learning with the EYFS goals. The staff are willing to make the changes for the next academic year.

Following the recommendation made after the first visit, longer observations of children now take place and are evaluated; including the children's interests on the short observations would further enhance practice. The parents have access to the children's individual profiles. These contain excellent photographs, reports, observations and examples of the children's work.

The teachers understand that they are responsible for keeping the children's records up to date; for identifying aims and targets for their key children and sharing information with each other and parents. The staff ensure they are up to date with children's progress through regular meetings which, following the recommendation from the first visit, are now minuted. There is excellent communication among the staff and they work exceptionally well together in the small school.

The topic planning is shared by all three of the staff involved with the nursery and organized into weekly projects. The two sister schools are able to share resources and the small school has the benefit of sharing experience with all the staff at Iverna Gardens. They change the materials in the prepared environment to enhance the project work – for instance the Spring theme was very evident in the room during the first visit and South America during the second. French, drama and music are offered in addition to the Montessori curriculum.

Children successfully develop their spoken language through interaction, conversation and answering appropriate questions posed by the staff. A wide range of languages are spoken by the children. The nursery promotes inclusion by welcoming all families and offering additional support where appropriate. Through observations, children with special needs are identified and the appropriate external agencies are then involved.

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

The classroom is small and bright and very well resourced with Montessori and other materials. As the nursery is attached to the main body of the church the music from the church during their weekly morning services makes for a rather unique atmosphere. It has a calming effect and does not disturb the children. The shelves have been systematically laid out and are accessible to the children to aid their independent exploration of the environment. The materials cover the Montessori curriculum areas and meet the children's developmental needs.

The staff take great pride in providing the children with interesting and inviting materials that are clean and changed to enhance their project work. A flower rota has been established for parents to bring in fresh flowers, which brighten up the environment.



Free flow operates from 9.20 when the children are given the opportunity to use the outside area. This charming garden was previously separated into two areas. On the day of the first visit the smaller of the two areas was available throughout the morning and was equipped with a water tray, role play office, shop and a book corner and it has plants and trees. The larger area has now also been incorporated into the space made available for use throughout the morning. It consists of flowerbeds, sandpit, large building blocks and an area for digging. Bicycles, tunnels and watering the plants are also enjoyed. The children are comfortable with their outside area and are able to explore effectively.

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

The excellent partnership that the staff have with the parents ensures that the latter are well informed. The parents feel up to date with their children's progress and appreciate the time the management spends exchanging information and educating them about the Montessori philosophy and how to enhance independence at home.

The extensive range of appropriate practical life exercises available to the children provides them with opportunities to develop self-help skills from an early age. The child-sized shelving, self-registering and the children's freedom to choose where they want to work all contribute to their independence. The children are involved in a wide range of activities and are free to choose where they work, repeat exercises and work at their own pace during the two and half hour work cycle. The extracurricular activities take place at the beginning of the morning twice a week and Monday starts with a circle time to introduce the project work. It would promote the children's independence more effectively to offer them the freedom to choose an activity when they first enter the classroom.

Respect for the natural environment is promoted whilst using the outside area. The staff sensitively address how to learn respect for each other and disputes are quickly resolved.

The snack table is now a small sturdy table big enough for three children to use at the same time. The introduction of glass and china for the children to use further promotes their respect for the materials they use.

The children are redirected when necessary by caring, competent staff who reinforce the ground rules. The staff are excellent role-models for the children's behaviour and they also reinforce their guidance through role play.

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

Children thrive in this small and dynamic learning environment. The children are well settled and they thoroughly enjoy taking part in the varied range of worthwhile and stimulating activities, both indoors and outdoors. The communication and co-operation between the small team is good and staff give the children a high degree of freedom. Help is at hand should they need it.

Vertical grouping is evident as all the children are in the same room. The key person system is in place and the key person is responsible for keeping the children's records up to date and liaising with the parents on all aspects of their development. Staff take it in turns to present or



supervise the environment. This changes every day so that all the children work with all the staff. Information is shared about individual children through the meetings and daily contact with each other.

The children decide whether they work inside or out and are able to choose what they do. The high ratio of adults on the day of the first visit ensured that the children were kept occupied in a purposeful way and they are now encouraged to help the staff tidy the outside area at the end of the morning.

French, Drama and music and movement are offered as extracurricular activities. None were timetabled for the day of the first visit. On the second visit French was timetabled for the beginning of the morning. Circle time at the beginning of the morning now only takes place on Mondays; this could also be moved to the end of the morning.

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

The nursery forms very close working relationships with parents and carers. Parents speak glowingly of the intuitive and friendly staff and all that they do for the children. A free exchange of information means that parents, carers and staff are all kept extremely well informed about every aspect of children's achievements, well-being and development. This means that parents and carers can become fully involved in their children's learning. Relationships with other professionals and external agencies involved with the children are well established and highly effective, contributing strongly to supporting children's on-going welfare and learning. The termly parents 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 staff are working towards improving their record keeping and are currently planning training in the new requirements for the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS).

The staff do short observations of the children regularly and have recently introduced longer observations. This information contributes to the children's reports. The weekly staff meetings are used as an opportunity to keep up to date 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 records and reports could be laid out under the six areas of learning, with the Montessori areas mapped to the Early Learning Goals and the record system consolidated. The staff are working towards changing their record system after they have had training.

Comprehensive risk assessments are carried out every day. Staff routines and responsibilities are clear and support safe working practices.

### **Staffing:**

The head demonstrates a deep commitment to the school. She has over thirty-three years' experience working in a Montessori environment. The organizational structure at Victoria Road is undergoing change, with a new manager from Iverna Gardens starting in September 2012.



The head and two permanent members of staff currently work directly with the children and all hold a Montessori qualification. The head shares her time between the two schools and has an appointed manager at Victoria Road who takes the lead in her absence. On the day of the second visit the new manager spent the morning in the school getting to know the children and their parents.

Good leadership skills are demonstrated by the sensitive way that the staff are managed. Clear understanding of the staff roles, and the head's receptive attitude to the teachers and their suggestions, all make for a happy team. The staff are excellent at supporting each other and there is a well-established system for appraisals. Courses are attended when a need is identified, such as child protection and the new EYFS, and in-service training is organized in conjunction with their sister school. New resources are purchased when they are needed.

Separate job descriptions are in place for staff and responsibilities are clearly designated. Staff are usually recruited from students that attend the school and a comprehensive induction handbook is provided. The small size of the team means that peer on peer observations are on-going.

Staff meetings occur regularly but are now minuted. Because the school is small verbal communication is on-going and effective. As all the staff are Montessori qualified they are able to create a genuine Montessori learning environment.

Name of Assessor Charlotte White

Date of reports:

First visit – 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2012

Second visit – 29<sup>th</sup> May 2012