



# **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.

### **Woodentots Montessori School**

6 Rochester Road, Camden, London NW1 9JH

Date of first re-accreditation visit: 18 June 2012

Date of second re-accreditation visit: 27 November 2012

Date of previous MEAB accreditation: January 2009.

This accreditation report relates to the provision for children aged 2 to 5 years

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

Woodentots Montessori School is located in a residential area of the London Borough of Camden. It opened in 1989 and operates from two rooms in the specially adapted basement of a residential property. One of the classrooms is located at the back of a well established, effectively resourced garden area, which also incorporates an area for Forest School. All children have access to the outdoor area at all times.

On the morning of the second visit 20 children aged 2 to 5 years attended. There are currently 32 children on roll. The school supports children with Special Educational Needs (SEN) and English as an additional language (EAL).

The school offers flexibility and choice of attendance on weekdays from a morning session between 9.00 and 12 noon, an afternoon session from 12 noon to 15.00 and a full day session from 9.00 to 15.00, during term time. Children who attend the afternoon or full day session bring a packed lunch.

The school is led by the owner/principal who holds a Montessori International Diploma, and Forest School Level 3 certificate. The working team is made up of a manager who holds a Montessori International Diploma and is working towards a Montessori foundation degree and the Early Years Professional Status (EYPS). There are four other members of staff, all of whom hold or are working towards the Montessori International Diploma. The school also supports students studying for their Montessori International Diploma.



## **Summary and conclusion**

Woodentots Montessori School aims to provide a calm, industrious atmosphere for the children to develop and learn in. This is evident in the consistent response of the teachers through their role modeling, communication with the children and delivery of learning linked to both planned topics and spontaneous discovery.

The well resourced environments, both indoors and outdoors provide a wealth of choice across all areas of the curriculum to ensure a holistic development for the children who attend. A highly effective emphasis is placed upon the creative and natural environment which is particularly evident in the highly resourced outside garden and play area. Since the first visit the team have made further improvements to the garden classroom, which now provides a wide choice of art and creative materials enabling children to explore and design using ideas of their own and facilitated by the teachers.

Children are encouraged to be independent and have awareness for their own personal and social development and this is apparent in practice. All the children move freely accessing all the areas of learning through individual choice including changing their own shoes without prompting when choosing to go out into the garden to play. Following the first visit the team have incorporated different strategies that ensures an uninterrupted session such as the dance teacher playing her flute gently when the dance class is about to start into the garden classroom thus extending the child's opportunities for free choice.

Woodentots Montessori provides a happy, busy, secure environment for all the children who attend.

***The school provides an education which follows the principles of the Montessori approach and environment. The school has successfully addressed 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:***

- Reflect on and review the role of the adults and ensure continuity of application with ground rules across the setting.
- Continue to reflect on and review the needs of the child through effective learning that encourages engagement and focused involvement.
- Continue to reflect on and review the application of the journey through the EYFS and Montessori curriculums in the child's Learning Journey.

### **Philosophy:**

Woodentots Montessori School aims to provide a learning environment that fosters independence, creativity, love, security and freedom for the child to develop at their own individual pace. This busy and happy environment provides the firm foundation for their aims to be effectively achieved. The team at the school work efficiently together to ensure that this is consistently modeled irrespective of which environment the child may be in.

Children are encouraged from the moment they arrive to learn to take responsibility for their own care: the sensitive and consistent guidance of the staff enables the child to do things for



himself/herself. In practice, this is clearly seen through the ability of all children to change their shoes confidently and without hesitation, put on their slippers, and know where to find their wellington boots for outside play.

Staff regularly model and sensitively remind children of the school's ground rules and in practice this is evident through the children's sense of trust and respect in the environment. During the first visit this included the care of the new baby chicks. Spontaneous response by the team to the children's own ideas and thoughts are encouraged through shared communication where children are guided into thinking for themselves. Following the first visit the garden classroom now offers a creative and art area enabling all children to freely use it if they wish. The team should now continue to reflect on and review the effectiveness of this area to ensure that the opportunities for the child's self-initiated learning becomes embedded.

Woodentots Montessori promotes confidence, safety and security in the learning environment for the children who attend.

### **Learning and Development:**

The layout of the school facilitates good access all areas of learning. As soon as they arrive, children are able to free-flow into the garden, or choose the table they want to work and play on. This practice provides holistic access for spontaneous learning and opportunities for the children to extend and make connections across environments. Following the first visit the team have reflected on aspects of the school's mission and evaluated the school day, including whole group lessons. New strategies are now in place aimed at ensuring that these lessons, which focus on music and movement, now happen in the garden or the garden classroom. On the day of the second visit the dance teacher played her flute as she walked through the classroom to indicate that a lesson would start shortly. Some children acknowledged the signal and went to join her. Others, although looking up and the sound, returned to their activity. The team is encouraged to continue to observe and reflect upon further strategies to ensure they continue to meet their vision and aim.

Staff are highly effective in encouraging children to question, recall and describe events. They provide sensitive guidance and communication in extending the child's thoughts towards self-discovery and self-initiated learning. This was particularly evident during play in the outside area when a child designed a roadway including traffic lights. Other children on wheeled vehicles joined in and responded to the rules. Adult-led activities are well planned, with clear aims and rationales for meeting children's developmental progress. During the second visit this aspect has been clearly extended to the inside rooms and was seen in practice when two children were playing with an activity involving animals from around the world. The teacher was asking descriptive questions to encourage the children to think and recall which animal she was describing. The lesson was also linked with the continents on a large map of the world available in the classroom.

Adults are consistent with their language and regularly use song and rhyme to reinforce and support routine. This form of learning and development holistically meets all children's needs in the area of communication and language. In practice this was evident in that all the children – including those with EAL – communicate effectively, often copying the rhyme and rhythmic use of the words used by the adults. The constant and uniform use of labeling and pictures in all of the environments further provides effective evidence of how the adults meet individual needs.



During the second visit this practice was still clearly evident when staff use the tune of the same song but using different words for different situations to encourage good behaviour and recall of classroom rules.

Staff provide clear formative evidence of the children's learning and development and this is well documented in the child's individual learning journey. A review each term based upon the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) provides goals for next steps and links to the Montessori curriculum. Since the first visit the management team has introduced a new format for each child's learning journey. Utilising a core part of a system submitted by the local authority this process now enables a more user-friendly process when evaluating, summarizing and setting next steps as part of the children making progress. However, with the focus now mainly on the EYFS, opportunities are missed in linking the child's development to the Montessori early years curriculum.

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

The school is well resourced throughout. Montessori materials are available in all classrooms and displayed on low shelves making them easily accessible for all children. A wide variety of resources across the curriculum are also available in the outside area providing clear opportunities for making connections and extending understanding. All activities are appropriate and adequate for the age range in each classroom. This was particularly evident where activities planned for refining everyday skills (such as pouring or transferring with a spoon or tongs) are present in the classroom with the younger children, and a wider range of activities focused on threading small beads, hammering, and sewing is available to the older children. Following the first visit this excellent aspect of the children's learning and development has been extended to the garden classroom to ensure consistency, refinement and repetition of skills across the whole provision.

The introduction of the garden room as a creative workshop area enables vertical grouping across the whole setting all the time. It offers a wide range of resources which effectively facilitate spontaneous and self-initiated as well as planned projects supported by the adult.

The layout and space across the whole school provides for ease of movement and access to space for all children. Children had sufficient space to play and work together in pairs or small groups and are also given opportunities to work and play alone. Children are encouraged to use floor mats and low lap-trays as floor tables to define their individual space. Since the first visit smaller individual tables are now being used. In practice this was seen through individual children becoming involved in the activity of their choice, whilst still promoting an element of socialisation. However, opportunities to ensure that the busy child is not interrupted can still be missed as a result of the adult supervision and their role in the environment.

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

Independence of the child is fostered throughout the whole school and this is particularly evident in all children's ability to care for themselves. Examples in practice include preparing snack, going to the toilet, changing shoes, hanging up coats, and accessing equipment.



Respect for themselves, each other and the environment are obvious in practice through caring for the baby chicks and helping to prepare a group snack then washing up.

For most children the uninterrupted work cycle was approximately 1½ hours during the first visit; this has now been extended to 2½ hours. Within this time children are free to move around the school and make choices. Staff sensitively direct children to new activities or help them to recall what they have enjoyed in the past. Changes made to the setting since the first visit now ensure that all children have a choice of where to work. Children who have their coat peg in the garden classroom are encouraged to think about what activity they would like and where they might find it; alternatively, other children are regularly asked where would they like to play and are reminded of the garden and the garden room. Small group activities now evolve without interruption to other children although environmental triggers do allow the children the opportunity to know if something planned is about to start.

An individual snack, further promoting the child's independence and self-care, is on offer every morning and children help themselves by pouring their drink and preparing their snack. On the day of the first visit the children had peas to eat which they podded themselves. During the second visit children were peeling and preparing their own carrots. A larger group snack is also on offer later in the morning for the children outside. During the second visit these children were offered a warm drink. This snack is aimed at promoting respect through a planned social event and takes place outside every day, under cover. The children are welcome to join and at least eight children can sit around the table at any one time. Again children help in taking the snack outside and preparing the fruit or biscuits that may be on offer. The care and empathy of the children, which is consistently role modeled by adults, was clearly seen again during the second visit. For example one child said to another "I can help you" and later when another had accidentally knocked a block down he said to his friend "I am so sorry, I can help you build it again".

Parents felt that their children's independence has increased since joining the nursery. They also commented on the setting's communication about their aims and vision, which supported encouraging independence at home. In particular the aspect of self-care was especially highlighted amongst all parents interviewed. The team have worked hard since the first visit to provide more opportunities for parents to have access to the school and to understand their children's learning and progress. Additional activities outside of the school day are planned throughout the term and included a lantern walk around the square and garden to acknowledge the festival of diwali.

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

The school is excellently managed. Roles and responsibilities are clearly defined and the staff show good knowledge of what is expected of them. Children are guided and encouraged to choose activities and they are keen to play with adults and work with Montessori materials.

There is a balance between planned adult-led activities and child-led spontaneous activities each day. Adults are close at hand to help and extend thoughts and ideas or to guide the children into thinking about what they might like to do next. Following the first visit the new layout of the tables enables more self-initiated learning amongst children. However, further opportunities for the children to become independently engaged and involved were lost due to the constant close proximity of the adult to the child.



The school offers a variety of group activities including music and dance. These all take place during the children's work cycle. A well-planned, age-appropriate music lesson was observed during the first visit. All the children joined the lesson and closely followed the instructions being delivered by the adult. The lesson spontaneously incorporated the baby chicks and the podding of the peas into songs at the suggestion of the children. Since the first visit new strategies enable children to have a more flexible choice to join these sessions if they wish. More consistency in applying the ground rules and keeping this philosophy at heart would enhance the children's learning further.

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

The school has excellent links with parents. All parents commented on the user-friendly and well documented child's Learning Journey which enables them to see what their child is doing and to help them to extend this process/progress at home

An excellent summative report is prepared as part of the child's transition to the next school. This document provides clear evidence of the excellent knowledge the team possess of the EYFS and areas of development, in particular individual development steps. The document is user-friendly, clear and concise for both parents and the next school. Since the first visit the introduction of the new EYFS (2012) document has required introduction of a new summative assessment report for all children between 24 and 36 months old attending the setting. This assessment includes an evaluation of the child's first days at the school and a contribution from the parents on their child's learning at home. Setting next steps agreed with the parents are part of this process. The team is encouraged to embed this new process in their assessment routines and continue to reflect upon its effectiveness.

Parents spoke highly of the strong links forged between themselves and their child's key person, also indicating that all members of the team are available for informal chats, and that they have constant and regular access to the classroom. They stressed the positive links that the school has in place such as newsletters, outings once a term and the school's traditions and regular events such as the life cycle of the baby chicks and the recent Maypole dancing in providing them and their families with a strong bond with the nursery. Monthly newsletters continue to provide lots of information together with weekly email reminders of what is happening the following week for the parents. The introduction of a nature table just outside the school door encourages parents to engage in conversation and be a part of the child's learning at the start of each day.

### **Staffing:**

The staff work together as a team and are consistent in their knowledge and practice. This is obvious in the clear and concise planning documents which show the link to the classroom activities. Staff meetings are documented indicating a process of reflective practice aimed at making connections between the classrooms and the documentation throughout the school. Since the first visit the manager and owner have both attended Local Authority training to review the new EYFS (2012). The manager has also attended Local Authority training on how to review the child's Learning Journey. In practice this has contributed to the team's



implementation of the new framework.

The school's documentation shows clearly how it supports all members of staff with induction, appraisal and continued professional development. Staff commented on the support they are given for further training and development. This is evident in the Montessori diploma training being made available to one member of the team. Since the first visit a further member of staff has completed her Montessori training. Senior management could enhance this aspect further by implementing a clearly outlined process of reflective practice which should include peer observation, which will enable the team to gain better understanding of their roles, share good practice and ensure continuity of delivery across the whole provision.

This enthusiastic, passionate and dedicated team is highly qualified. They are led by the owner and principal whose vision and long term commitment provide a solid foundation for the school.

Name of Assessor: Dawn Nasser

Date of reports:       First visit – 18 June 2012  
                              Second visit – 27 November 2012