

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". The second visit sought to assess the progress made following 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.

Hopes And Dreams Montessori School

339-341 City Road, Islington, London EC1V 1LJ

Date of first accreditation visit: 11 April 2011

Date of second accreditation visit: 11 May 2011

This accreditation report relates to the provision for children aged 2½ to 5 years

Description of the school:

Hopes and Dreams Montessori School is situated in a large Victorian conversion in Islington, five minutes walk from Angel Islington underground situation. The immediate area is made up of residential and business premises. The school accepts children from 3 months to 5 years. On leaving Hopes and Dreams children may attend one of the many state or private schools in the area. The environment is welcoming and thoughtful use has been made of space available. The school has recently acquired an adjoining piece of land which, although small, has been developed into a garden for all age groups. Containers provide gardening opportunities and a climbing wall gives children opportunities for risk-taking. Sand and water tables and stepping stones are also provided. The school is registered for 123 children and there are currently 197 children on roll. Of these, 45 are under 2 years of age, 32 are 2 to 3 years, and 46 are 3 to 5 years of age. This report relates to the children from 2½ to 5 years of age. Although sessional care is offered most children attend for full days, which run from 08:00 to 18:00 with a 'later' hour, offered from 18:00 to 19:00. The school is open for 52 weeks of the year. There are currently no children with special educational needs attending the school.

Many of the children attending the school have English as an additional language and this diversity is celebrated throughout the school environment. The 2½ to 5 year olds are divided between two classrooms, 'Snowdrops' and 'Rainbows' which each consist of two rooms separated by a door. Extra-curricular activities offered include French, ballet and football and these take place in the afternoon – the work cycle having been made available to all children in the morning. The managing director holds an NNEB qualification and a Certificate in Post Qualifying Studies (Childcare). The nursery manager holds an NVQ3 and Montessori Teaching Diploma. Of the nine staff working with the children in the age range

to be accredited, four hold a Montessori International Diploma. One of these staff members also holds a BA in Child Development, one holds an NVQ3 in Childcare and one holds a Bachelors Degree in Biology as well as Qualified Teacher Status (QTS). Two staff are currently undertaking a Montessori International Diploma and one of these holds an NVQ3 in Childcare and the other holds a Masters Degree in Pedagogy (Poland) which is equivalent to NVQ5. Of the remaining three staff one holds a BSc in Education, one holds NVQ3 in Health and Social Care and one is currently studying for NVQ2. Hopes and Dreams have received the NDNA 'Quality Counts' award and have achieved green level (highest grade possible) in their Local Authority Quality Indicators.

Summary and conclusion.

This is a very well managed Montessori school providing a high level of Montessori education to predominately working parents in a busy city area. The school is very well-resourced and there are many excellent learning opportunities on offer to the children. Children's learning is well-supported by knowledgeable staff who have the Montessori ethos at the root of their practice, together with excellent planning and record-keeping procedures which show good links to the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). The school environment is bright and welcoming and the staff are warm and friendly and are good role-models for the children in their care.

The school provides an education which follows the principles of the Montessori approach and environment. This merits accreditation by the Montessori Evaluation and Accreditation Board . The school has successfully achieved the points for action recommended on the first visit, which are documented within this report.

- Although there are no specific points for ongoing development, the setting should continue to promote high quality care and education for all children attending.

Philosophy:

Hopes and Dreams Montessori School aims to provide a diverse curriculum based on Montessori principles and the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). They state their aims in their parent handbook and website and these are also displayed in the reception area. They accurately reflect the extent to which Montessori philosophy is present in the 2½ year to 5 year age group for which accreditation is sought. The leadership of the school is very effective and this results in consistency throughout this large setting. Interactions between staff and children are mutually respectful and staff work as a strong team to ensure that observations of children are recorded and used to plan the next steps for each child according to their interests. Children are free to make choices, they are confident and are proud of their independence and keen to show their knowledge and ability.

Learning and Development:

All of the staff working with the 2½ to 5 year olds are involved in long-term and medium-term planning. This takes into account the EYFS and the Montessori areas of

learning and is with regard to a work-cycle of at least 2½ hours. Children attending Hopes and Dreams represent many different nationalities and the planning reflects and celebrates this. Each child has a key person who undertakes short-term planning with regard to the child's interests and developmental stage. The school has a designated Special Educational Needs Co-coordinator (SENCo). The nursery's nutrition policy outlines the procedures for children with allergies and special dietary requirements, which involve parents completing a form detailing their child's requirements. Each child at the nursery has an individual tablemat which has a photograph of them and a list of foods which they must not be given. Because the classrooms are in two sections the staff have developed a very effective system of recording observations, not only for their own 'key children', but for all of the children in their classroom. Spontaneous observations are recorded both on sticky labels and on a wall chart that enables each key person to immediately adjust the focus areas for their key children. These observations are then recorded in children's individual 'Profiles' which are shared with parents and stay with the child throughout their time at the school. Each child also has a 'Journey' book in which they can choose to put samples of their work, make drawings or glue photographs of themselves and their friends, and take home whenever they like. Longer focused observations are also made of children and these are used to plan for the child and to assess the activities and resources on offer in the classrooms.

Prepared Environment: resources and materials

Hopes and Dreams Montessori School provides excellent resources for the 2½ to 5 year age group for which accreditation is sought. The classrooms are divided into the Montessori areas of learning and the Montessori materials are in very good condition, appropriate for the stage of the children, arranged logically and easily accessible to the children. Many other materials which support the Montessori areas of learning are also available and these are well-considered and of good quality and stored in an orderly way so as not to clutter the environment. There are enough materials so that several children can work simultaneously in the same area. The school has an Equipment and Resources Policy to ensure that the equipment is safe, that there is sufficient quantity, that all areas of development are covered, that there are sufficient challenges and that children can access items independently. Children's views are sought on new equipment before it is purchased. The garden is accessed from the younger children's area on the basement level so this provision is time-tabled for the 2½ to 5 year olds.

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

The staff at Hopes and Dreams make every effort to support children's independence. Children move freely between the two areas of each classroom, using a self-register chart to ensure that not all children are in the same area at the same time. The children perform self-care tasks with confidence and staff are careful not to intervene unless the child asks for help. The children take care of the environment, returning

materials to the shelves and using dusters and brooms which they access independently. Nutritional snacks are freely available and children serve themselves and tidy up after themselves. Nature tables with fish tanks are present in both of the 2½ to 5 year old classrooms and the children can take home a 'nursery pet' for the week-end which gives them a feeling of responsibility. The children were consulted about their wishes for the development of the newly acquired garden which, although small, is well planned and provides an outdoor environment for the children with opportunities for gardening and observing mini-beasts. Outdoor visits such as to the library and road safety training are a regular occurrence and the children look forward to going out and being engaged in the local community. The school is pro-active with regard to recycling and the children are involved in recycling paper within the classroom and other related projects.

The school has an Equality and Diversity Officer who ensures that activities are designed in keeping with parents and staff's cultural backgrounds and give children respect for other nationalities. Events such as 'Grandparent's Day' give children respect for the older community and Makaton signs throughout the school enable children to relate to differently-abled children.

Parents are given daily verbal feedback and an 'Ask me about...' form is sent home when a child has done something which is important to them, enabling parents to support their child at home. Informative literature is made available to parents giving them information about the Montessori philosophy and they appreciate how this helps them to celebrate their child's newly acquired skills.

Montessori practice: classroom management

The staff of Hopes and Dreams Montessori School have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities and this ensures that the school runs smoothly, children are kept safe and they feel secure. Effective policies and procedures are in place and these are easily accessible to parents so that they also understand what is expected of them. The key person policy works well and parents know who their child's key person is which ensures effective communication. Vertical grouping of children in Snowdrops and Rainbow classrooms enables them to learn from – and teach their skills to – each other, so developing independence. A minimum 2½ hour work cycle gives them sufficient time to follow their own needs. Staff in these classrooms work exceptionally well together, particularly with regard to the layout of the classrooms, and support each other and each other's key children.

Montessori Practice: links with parents, including reports and records

The leadership and staff structure of Hopes and Dreams Montessori School creates an environment where all staff feel effective in their role of creating a safe, suitable learning environment for the children in their care. All new staff receive thorough induction training and detailed job descriptions as well as three-month and six-month

assessments. They state that they receive excellent support from their colleagues and that the regular room meetings ensure that they know what is expected of them. There is a nominated Safeguarding Officer and all staff are trained in safeguarding children. The school operates a fingerprint entrance system and 24-hr CCTV which, one parent said, gives him peace of mind when he leaves his children at the school. Parents appreciate newsletters, on-line planning information, memos and the year-planner which keep them informed of events. Management utilise parent questionnaires, a suggestion box and feed-back forms, such as those after parent/teacher meetings, to find out what parents think and how they can improve their service. Parents said that they initially chose the school because it is well-run rather than because it is a Montessori School, but that since their child started at the school they have come to appreciate the benefits of Montessori education. A booklet, *Hopes and Dreams Guide to the Montessori Classroom*, is available in the reception area. The school has also produced a brochure called *The big school issue* which gives parents information about choosing schools in the North London area.

Staffing

Hopes and Dreams is a professionally managed Montessori setting with excellent staff recruitment and appraisal systems in place. The manager's commitment to the Montessori philosophy is very strong and this is shared by her staff. Children benefit from the staff's commitment to the Montessori ethos as this has created a true Montessori learning environment. The school induction programme is thorough and supports new staff while ensuring that they know what is expected of them. There is a positive approach to ongoing training (both in-house and external, Montessori and EYFS) and a staff structure document and a training plan are in place. Staff complete feedback forms to enable management to assess the efficacy of any training. Regular room meetings and team meetings are held and these are minuted and copied to management who monitor action points. Annual staff appraisals are held, with a six-month review to track progress. Since the first accreditation visit the school has begun to develop an Assessment Policy and has recently instigated a procedure for observations of staff by management. Such observations will enable the management team to assess the quality of teaching at the school and will be used to inform staff appraisals.

Several members of staff hold extra responsibilities, such as 'Charity coordinator' and children and staff enjoy participation in various charity events.

Susie Norman
Name of Assessor

13th May 2011
Date of report