

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.

Seedlings Montessori Nursery

St. John Vianney Parish Hall, Charlton Road, Wantage, Oxfordshire OX12 8EP

Date of first accreditation visit: 31 March 2011

Date of second accreditation visit: 5 May 2011

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

Description of the school

Seedlings Montessori Nursery is situated in the parish hall of the village of Wantage, Oxfordshire. The hall has one large room, with a store room, kitchen and toilet facilities adjoining the main room. The equipment is set up and packed away each session. There is one large, secure garden area adjacent to the hall. The setting also makes good use of the surrounding area.

There are three members of staff who attend regularly; one holds EYPS, BA (Hons) in Early Childhood Education and an International Diploma in Montessori Pedagogy, one holds B Ed (Hons) and the third holds a Montessori International Diploma in Early Childhood. The setting is co-owned by two of the current members of staff. All staff members have undertaken paediatric first aid training and two staff members have undertaken training in food hygiene.

The setting offers sessions every morning during term times and offers one afternoon session per week for the Summer term. There are currently twenty nine children enrolled who attend throughout the week and the setting is registered for twenty children per session.

Staff are well trained in catering for children with additional needs and for those for whom English is an additional language.

Summary and conclusion.

Seedlings Montessori Nursery offers a genuine Montessori environment where the children are able to explore and discover their prepared environment at their own pace.

Montessori’s descriptions of the child, family and prepared environment are reflected throughout the setting, the school is very aware that the parents are important partners in providing for each child’s individual welfare, learning and development.

The school's literature is clear and detailed, providing visitors and parents with a very good understanding of the school, its philosophy and principles.

The staff within the school are experienced, enthusiastic, spontaneous and very aware of the children's individual needs within their setting. Emphasis is placed on the children leading and the adults supporting them in their learning.

The children are encouraged to learn independence and life skills and enjoy freedom of choice. They are able to express themselves and pursue their individual interests.

The school's planning is relevant and all members of the staff team contribute. Individual children's planning is well-organised. There is good written evidence of links made between the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) and the Montessori curriculum.

The setting places great importance on social and emotional development, which is encouraged through daily activities such as using the painting easel and during snack time, where all children within the mixed group have to show patience, take turns and consider others.

Seedlings Montessori School has a good range of Montessori materials which are suitable for the ages and ability of the children who attend the setting.

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. Points for ongoing development:

- Continue to develop opportunities for free flow between the indoor and outdoor environments.
- Ensure that the recently introduced peer observations and staff appraisal processes inform and support self-evaluation of performance.

Philosophy

The owners have a very good understanding of Montessori philosophy and a profound commitment to providing a nurturing and genuine Montessori environment. Seedlings Montessori Nursery provides a variety of experiences for children to build on their learning journey and benefit from a true Montessori environment. This commitment is evident throughout the setting's day to day preparations and is reflected in staff practice. The environment is prepared to cater for all the children who attend the setting.

All staff members are encouraged to reflect upon and develop their working knowledge in order to improve the prepared environment for the benefit of each child attending.

Comprehensive explanation of Montessori philosophy and principles are given throughout the setting's literature. Montessori's descriptions of the child, the family and the prepared environment are reflected within the provision. Parents, grandparents and carers are considered to be important partners in supporting the individual child's welfare and development. The setting places great emphasis on freedom of choice and nurturing individual needs.

Learning and Development

Seedlings Montessori Nursery operates from one main classroom area, in which the Montessori materials are arranged and offered to the children throughout the work cycle. The setting offers a good range of experiences and exploration opportunities for the children across the week and throughout the year. A full range of Montessori equipment is available daily, with the addition of regular art and craft provision, and cookery. Yoga and music groups are offered by specialist teachers during the work cycle. Outdoor pursuits include physical games with bikes, balls, a parachute and practical care of the garden.

The setting makes full use of the benefits of vertical age grouping. The children are actively encouraged to share their knowledge and understanding with each other, for example, the older children can present the Montessori materials to the younger children.

Staff work closely with each other in planning the curriculum, including projects, group and individual activities. Long and short term plans are drawn up as a team. These plans are displayed on the parents' notice board and also included in the monthly parents' newsletters, thus informing them in advance. There is flexibility in delivery of the curriculum in response to children's needs. This flexibility serves to support the adults in their commitment to improve the environment and ensure that it meets the needs of each individual child attending, as well as allowing for spontaneity and exploration in the daily provision. This is a particular strength of the setting. Emphasis is placed on children learning by doing, on exploring, and on the child leading and the adults supporting them in their learning.

Daily individual records are comprehensive and simple to use, giving an immediate picture of a child's current stage. A good range of observational techniques is employed and photographs play a significant part in record-keeping for the individual. Seedlings Montessori Nursery extends children's learning and focuses on the children's interest and experiences. For example, an 'exploring dinosaurs' activity has been linked to introducing books to name the dinosaurs and to problem solving puzzles.

The setting has implemented a new written system to show evidence of extensions, interests of children and spontaneous activities; this information is transferred to the individual record of achievement.

Prepared Environment: resources and materials

Seedlings Montessori Nursery offers a good range of Montessori materials, suited to the age and ability levels of the children attending. The staff team maintain a beautiful, ordered environment, which they adapt in response to the needs of the children attending. The setting is a pack-away setting, which allows them to adapt and check the environment and materials daily. It is a nurturing, cosy, welcoming environment and the children are shown how to look after it. The adults understand the importance of their role in the Montessori environment in linking children with its opportunities. They also give priority to the child developing their senses, experiencing real tasks and being immersed in a language-rich environment.

The materials are set out around the classroom according to the areas of the Montessori curriculum and include cultural and creative play. They are systematically arranged from simple to complex, concrete to abstract and are accessible to all the children. Labelling of activities

and photographic routines further enhance the educational opportunities available. Seedlings Montessori Nursery is a small setting and with the full range of equipment offered, the quantity of the materials provision is very good.

Outdoor provision extends the practical life, sensorial, problem solving, reasoning and numeracy (maths), communication, language and literacy, cultural and creative range which is available indoors. Opportunity for free flow between indoor and outdoor provision has been put into practice, so enabling children to make greater use of the outdoor learning, and this development should be consolidated in order to secure continuous free flow provision.

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

The staff team at Seedlings Montessori Nursery understands the importance of facilitating children's independence. From the time that they start at the setting they are shown how to care for themselves, others and the environment. Children are given the time that they need to achieve tasks without adult intervention and staff will make changes in the environment to increase the opportunities for the individual child to achieve independence. The children are given a lot of freedom of choice and are well supported in making decisions for themselves throughout the work cycle. Children have access to the snack area throughout the session, where they help themselves and wash their own hands and dishes.

Children can choose what they want to do and with whom they wish to work during the morning work cycle, and staff provide extra support and guidance when needed.

The promotion of children's independence beyond the setting is achieved through written and verbal contact with parents. Parents are told how much their children are achieving by themselves at the setting and suggestions are offered as to how to extend their independence at home and the benefits of doing so. The setting also provides parents with printed material about education and the Montessori approach.

Staff actively promote the idea that every individual in the setting has a part to play in working together, looking after each other and caring for the environment together. The Montessori environment and the positive influence of the adults within it promote the development of children's self-esteem, confidence and self-respect.

The adults acknowledge the importance of positive role modelling, they demonstrate respect in their interaction with each other, with the children and with visitors. Positive behaviour is also supported in the choice of books, activities provided, discussions, visits that the children make and the type of visitors who are invited into the setting. For example, the children regularly visit a local elderly care home for a singing session and invite residents to the nursery at Christmas as well.

Children are taught strategies on how to interact and express their feelings with others through story books, story/rhyme boxes and having a waiting list for using the easel, all enabling the children to negotiate and discuss turn taking.

The setting has a good policy on equality and diversity and this is reflected in its practice,

offering the children a global perspective on respect for others through projects on other cultures and celebrations such as Chinese New Year.

Seedlings Montessori School aims to help children discover the joy of learning through hands-on experiences and exploration within a secure environment. The children show high levels of curiosity, enthusiasm, concentration, knowledge and confidence. They are aided in learning life skills, developing to their full potential and are helped in preparing for their future learning journey.

Montessori practice: classroom management

The classroom is well organised and managed for the benefit of the children attending. The children are confident, talkative and are settled in the routine of the setting. Consistently high levels of enthusiasm, excitement, motivation and concentration are achieved throughout the morning session.

A three hour Montessori work cycle is in place during the morning session.

Seedlings is a small setting and the children are grouped vertically, all sharing the same classroom. Each child is assigned a key person who is responsible for record-keeping, collation of observations, assessment of learning, preparing planning and reporting back to parents. During their time at the setting the children are presented materials and cared for by their key person as well as other adults, thereby enabling each child to get to know a variety of adults well. The setting also has regular volunteers whom the children respect and treat as part of the teaching team.

Continuous free-flow to the outside area would further enhance provision.

Montessori Practice: links with parents, including reports and records

The setting is very well organised, with excellent adult routines and good links with parents. Parents are seen as partners in their children's learning and development and can contribute to their recording and planning. They are offered various means of communicating with the setting and are informed about when staff are available for feedback and advice. Daily verbal contact is an important means of on-going support. There are many opportunities to get involved in activities and events throughout the year, for example coffee mornings, social evenings and an annual parents evening. Parents feel welcomed and involved, and that their children are well cared for and nurtured.

The owners have overall responsibility for health and safety and daily routines. All the adults are responsible for helping to maintain an ordered and safe environment and the classroom and garden areas are kept clean and safe for the children.

Policies and procedures are straightforward and support safe working practices. Risk assessments are carried out and reviewed daily and as necessary.

Record keeping and observation practices are effective and reflect good understanding of the

links between Montessori provision and the EYFS. Further development of record-keeping to include evidence of extensions, interests of children and spontaneous activities has been introduced, which has enhanced the children's learning profiles and serves to inform future plans.

The commitment of the teaching team to offering a dynamic learning environment for all whom attend is evident.

Staffing

The staffing structure is well organised, with clearly defined roles and it is documented. The structure helps create a solid and effective team. There is clear leadership alongside the expectation that all staff members have an individual contribution to make, for example with curriculum ideas and observations of children.

The process of staff induction is thorough and is reviewed once induction has been completed. Staff meetings are held monthly and recorded in the meeting book. The setting has recently introduced a formal appraisal and peer on peer observation system for assessing staff performance. Once this is embedded it will be a useful tool for self-reflection.

Training plans are drawn up and serve to inform continued professional development. Internal and external training is regularly attended and is effective in continuing to develop the skills of the staff team who are able practitioners, committed to offering a well-prepared and nurturing Montessori environment.

Name of Assessor: Hatice D'jela

Date of report: 05/05/2011