

Montessori Evaluation and Accreditation Board

School Accreditation

This report is prepared following an accreditation visit made on behalf of the Montessori Evaluation and Accreditation Board. It considers how far the school follows Montessori practice of “following the child”. The school is registered with the Ghana Education Service (Private Schools Unit) and meets the criteria for private nursery education in Ghana. The report does not provide any assessment of financial aspects of the school.

Little Explorers Montessori Plus School

1 Shippi Close, East-Cantonements, Accra, Ghana

Dates of accreditation visit: 16 and 17 March, 2010

The accreditation report assesses the Montessori practice offered to 18 month to 5 year old children in this setting

Description of the school:

This English-French bilingual Montessori school was established in 2007 with a capacity for 100 children. It is located in a residential area of Accra, close to the airport, in a villa converted into three large classrooms with supporting amenities (including offices, a kitchen and cloak-rooms and bathrooms) for each class. The extensive well-established garden provides an ideal, well shaded outdoor learning environment for the 60 children currently attending Little Explorers. There is a plan for a gradual expansion of the numbers of children attending.

The children currently on the roll represent a wide mix of the local and international community living in the area. They are organized into three groups by age: the Discoverers (blue) class accommodates 16 children between 18 and 30 months of age; the Pioneers (yellow class) is attended by 20 children between 30 to 42 months; and the Explorers (yellow) class has 24 children between the ages of three and half and five years. The children, who come from a wide variety of cultures and backgrounds, attend daily Monday to Friday between 7.30 and 13.00 during the school year.

The school is owned and managed by a partnership of two fully qualified Montessori teachers who play an active role in the daily running of the setting. They are supported by a team of 16 practitioners, all of whom have participated in a well-organized in-house training. Two team members are currently undertaking a distance learning Montessori Early Childhood Diploma course and two are participating in the Montessori Foundation Certificate course being delivered by Little Explorers. The school is also supported by eight auxiliary staff including administrators, gardeners, janitor, a cook and cleaners.

Summary and conclusion.

The Little Explorers Montessori Plus school is a well managed, equipped and organized Montessori setting committed to delivery of high quality Montessori education to children from eighteen months to five years of age. The high ratio of staff and their continued professional development within a clearly identified training programme ensure that the school’s commitment to “following the child” is implemented.

The school delivers the Montessori early years curriculum within a well established framework of international celebrations and festivals. Both English and French is spoken within the school by staff and children. The indoor and outdoor environments are rich in learning opportunities that are accessed by the children spontaneously within the daily work cycle.

Whilst there is no free flow between the inside and outside classrooms the transitions are managed sensitively and support the children's learning styles and rhythms. The children are independent in the choices of activities, in personal hygiene and during snack. The daily routines are well established and support the calm harmonious atmosphere of the school. Daily observations of children are discussed, "translated" into plans for the next day and recorded within a well established record keeping system. This is managed by the key persons within each classroom and overseen by owners of school.

There is a strong partnership with parents who have daily informal opportunities to discuss their child's progress. The termly parent/teacher interviews give them opportunities to relate to their children's progress based on their progress reports and samples of work recorded in the Montessori individual learning plans. Parent forum is held termly where parents find out more about the Montessori approach. The parents speak highly of their children's experiences in the school and are happy with their progress.

All children are nurtured in their growing autonomy and supported appropriately by a well motivated team that benefits from clear leadership and strong management structures. The setting's strong Montessori ethos is evident in the children's consideration for each other, relationships with the adults, care for the environment and harmonious atmosphere.

The school provides an education in accordance with the principles of the Montessori approach and environment and merits accreditation by the Montessori Evaluation and Accreditation Board. It is recommended that to uphold the high standards the school gives consideration to:

- Implementing the planned re-organisation of the yellow and green classrooms by creating one learning environment shared by the two and half to five year olds. This will further enhance the co-operative spirit of the school.
- continuing to develop the existing excellent team work by regular daily team discussions focused on children's progress, and further staff development.

Philosophy:

The school is committed to facilitating the physical, intellectual, linguistic, emotional and social development of its pupils by creating a Montessori-favourable environment designed to meet the individual potential of its pupils by promoting joy, respect and peace. All the staff at Little Explorers work towards this published mission statement by ensuring that they offer rich learning opportunities for all the children attending the setting. They model trust and respect for each individual and ensure that children are given time and individual attention, whilst encouraging their autonomy. The freedom within the indoor and outdoor environment, set within the limits of growing social awareness, kindness and calmness promotes children's self discipline and harmony. Children's individual needs are met by careful observation, regular meetings and discussion of their progress on which planning for individual progress is based. The ethos of "following the child" is strong at Little Explorers.

Learning and Development:

The learning is organized within the six Montessori areas of learning and supported by a good range of appropriate resources accessible to the children both inside and outside. There is consistency of approach in teaching and learning across the age groups; children are encouraged to be independent in their choices of activities, use of facilities, and in access to the outdoor learning environment. They are guided by supportive and sensitive adults who ensure that the activities are ready for use, accessible, and returned by the children to the shelves. The multicultural nature of the school is particularly evident in the cultural area of the school with regular celebrations of a wide range of festivals. During the accreditation visit St. Patrick's Day was celebrated by making of mashed potatoes, shamrocks being available in the art areas for sticking and St. Patrick's Day Parade organized for the end of the school day. Parents are welcome to spend a day in the school and encouraged to do cooking and share books with the children.

Spontaneous learning is supported both inside and outside the classroom. Whilst there is not a full free flow between the inside and outside due to the extreme weather conditions the adult/child ratios facilitate children's individual choices for working inside or outside. The transitions are managed well by established routines and supportive staff. At ten o'clock in the morning children have a snack brought from home, having had access to a two hour work cycle for the youngest children, and two and half hour work cycle for the older children. The space available offers the opportunity for the group snack to be had in a shaded and tarmac-covered area of the garden. The snack is usually followed by opportunities to continue spontaneous choice of activities inside and outside the classroom (weather permitting), participation in small group activities focusing on a planned topic, singing, music and movement or possible celebrations according to the international calendar. The day finishes at 12.30 with a short French singing circle and a relaxed collection of the children between 12.30 and 13.00.

The long term plan provided by the owners of the school follows the international calendar of celebrations and festivals, and links with medium term topic focus which is reflected in art activities and the cultural area of the classroom, and is available to parents. The short term plans follow the progress of each individual child and are based on staff's observations and intimate knowledge of the children. They linked with the Montessori activities available on the classroom and children's interest. This approach ensures that children's needs and interests are followed and supported.

Prepared Environment:

The school benefits greatly from the purpose-built facilities and extensive outdoor area. Currently the classrooms are organised to support children's learning and development according to their ages: from 18 to 30 months, two and half to three and half years of age and from three and half to five years. All three classrooms and the outdoor areas offer well arranged resources for the children attending, with free access, availability and good range of activities across the areas of the Montessori curriculum.

In the blue classroom emphasis is placed on availability of sensory exploration materials for the youngest children and on introduction to practical life and sensorial activities; there is a strong

focus on speaking and listening. Rhymes and songs, sung by all the teachers are key tools for engaging the children in speaking and listening. They also create a very happy atmosphere in the classroom.

In the yellow class, attended by the children between two and three and half years of age the focus is on extending children's skills of independence by providing a wider range of practical life activities and the full range of sensorial activities, supported by early literacy and numeracy together with a nature table, role play, art and book areas. Children were observed and encouraged to take full advantage of this rich learning environment and were able to follow cycles of activity demonstrating respect and a great deal of consideration for one another.

The green classroom provides a comprehensive set of learning materials appropriate for the oldest age group attending the school with ample opportunities to extend children's basic numeracy and literacy skills both in English and French.

The outdoor learning environment provides opportunities for all the children to develop their large movement, co-ordination, balance and spatial awareness. There are also role play areas, extensions to practical life activities such as washing dolly's clothes, bathing of dollies, planting of seeds and a small vegetable patch. Children are also offered opportunities for writing and creative activities as well as a shaded music area with a marimba, drums and pots and pans for spontaneous music making.

Adults prepare all learning environments carefully, with great attention to detail to ensure children's opportunities to engage in the activities spontaneously and carry out their chosen cycles of activity. This freedom of movement and choice is supported across all the classrooms, including the toddlers, who are very capable in selecting their chosen activities and places where they want to engage in them. All the adults in the school are mindful of children's needs to engage with activities according to their interest and level of concentration, following their individual rhythms. This respectful attitude towards the children creates a relaxed and harmonious, yet purposeful feeling across the whole school.

Across the whole school French and English is spoken by bilingual members of staff and children respond to both languages well.

There are plans to re-organise the yellow and green classrooms to create one large learning environment supporting all the two and half to five year olds within the setting and so to create a true vertical grouping and richer opportunities for social interactions.

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

The children's autonomy is respected and valued by all working within the school. This is evident in the way children are greeted in the morning, when they undertake self-registration and put their possessions in their "cubbyholes". In all three classrooms children choose their work, serve their own snack and feed themselves. They are aware of activities which require aprons and are able to put them on by themselves. With toilet facilities adjacent to each classroom, children are very good in personal hygiene, and are supported effectively when help is needed. The children's independence would be enhanced further by not only being able to

set and clear their own snack but also by washing their plates and the cutlery after use. This facility could be easily incorporated within the spacious outdoor snack area.

They also demonstrate their awareness of others by offering help and showing concern when other children are upset. During the short circle times when cultural activities are presented, books are read or songs are sung, the children have the freedom not to participate and as a result those who join such activities display good levels of participation and enjoyment. Parents are requested to support this autonomy at home and the owners of the school promote children's need for independence in daily contact with the parents and also during termly parent forums when they explain and encourage parents to give children time to do things for themselves. Despite the high level of domestic help available to the families whose children attend Little Explorers children are independent, and use the freedom available to them in a respectful and considerate manner.

Montessori practice: classroom management:

Children's learning and development are supported by a team of five staff with clearly defined roles and responsibilities within the classroom. In each room there is a French and English co-ordinator who also has key person responsibilities. However, all members of staff have a working knowledge of the activities on offer in each room and outside, and are able to share them with the children. They are competent in supporting children's independence by giving them time to choose activities, in personal hygiene, and encouraging return of all resources back to the shelf ready for others to use.

This coherent approach to classroom management is possible because of the daily high profile of the owners within the classrooms and due to the clearly defined roles and responsibilities which are consistently monitored. This strong leadership is further enhanced by the English-speaking owner taking responsibility for the younger children in the schools, whilst the French owner oversees the learning programme of the older children.

All staff meet at the end of each day to discuss their written and anecdotal observation of the children and voice their concerns. This discussion serves as the basis for individual learning plans for the children in their care. The long term plan for celebrations, festivals and projects is implemented through weekly planning meetings, which ensure that resources and arts and crafts activities, music and books will reflect the theme explored during that particular week.

The daily meetings also serve as an opportunity for the owners to highlight good practice and identify details which need to be developed and enhanced. This approach supports the established training programme well.

The classrooms are cleaned and prepared for the next day before staff leave around three o'clock. This approach ensures that a favourable learning environment is ready for the children the next day. It also highlights the need to maintain and organize the learning environment in order to facilitate the spontaneous learning of the child, a fundamental principle of the Montessori approach.

Montessori Practice: links with the wider community and parents, including reports and records:

The school provides comprehensive promotional materials for all prospective parents and a well considered induction programme for newcomers, with gradual introduction of the children and their families into the life of the school.

The staff are available to discuss children's daily life at school early in the morning and at the end of the day. These transitions are managed very well as all children take advantage of the outdoor learning environment when they first arrive at school or wait to be collected.

Children's records are regularly updated by their key persons and overseen by the school owners. They are available to parents prior to parent/teacher conferences usually held at the end of each term. Parents also receive regular newsletters to inform them about plans for celebrations and topical issues relating to the management of the school. They are invited to a termly parents forum when topics of Montessori practice are discussed and they are given opportunities to explore aspects of Montessori philosophy. These forums are well attended and reflect the support parents give to their children and the school.

The parent interviews during the accreditation visit reflected their support for children's independence at home and delight at their children's positive socialization at the school. They felt their children were well supported in their learning at the school and were growing into autonomous, happy and calm individuals.

The school has strong links with the community by supporting a chosen charity and are currently supporting an orphanage outside Accra.

Staffing:

The staff benefit from the clearly defined organizational structure, roles and responsibilities, and are supported by an in-house training programme, this ensures continuity of learning for the children attending. The staff are happy and active in their contribution to the efficient running of the school.

The owners who hold full Montessori diplomas and trainers certificates from MCI, alongside their original qualification, use their expertise to promote sound Montessori practice within the setting through a programme of continuous professional development.

Four of the sixteen-strong teaching team are currently undertaking MCI training, two at diploma level and two at certificate level. All members of staff have participated in public speaking training, and there are plans to offer yoga training to all staff.

The MCI training programme established last year will continue for the foreseeable future, providing Montessori training opportunities at certificate and diploma levels for the Ghanaian early years community. The owners are operating with the permission of the Ghanaian Ministry of Education and are seeking their continued support for the Montessori teacher training.

The school benefits from strong teamwork and clear and considerate leadership from its



owners. It is clear that the owners' vision for high quality Montessori education for the children attending the setting is delivered through the partnership between the owners, staff and parents. The school's continued growth, development and prosperity are strongly linked with continued reflective practice, training and professional development for all its members of staff.

Barbara Isaacs
Name of Assessor:

19 March, 2010
Date of report: