



# **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” (2012) and subsequent revisions. The second visit sought to assess the progress made on the recommendations set out in the report from the first visit as well as any further findings made during the second 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.

### **Beckett House Montessori Nursery**

98 Richmond Avenue, Islington, London N1 0LL

Date of the first accreditation visit: 30 April 2014

Date of the second accreditation visit: 2 October 2014

This accreditation report relates to the provision for children aged 27 months to 5 years.

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

Beckett House Montessori Nursery is located in a church building in a residential road in north London, and is a privately owned setting that opened in 1996. The nursery comprises one large classroom, toilets, a kitchen and office. It has direct access from the classroom to a very small outside area. The nursery has sole use of its premises at all times.

The nursery is open from 8.30 to 17.30, Monday to Friday, 46 weeks of the year and offers a variety of part-time and full-time places. There are currently 30 children on roll. On the day of the second visit 13 children attended the morning session and eight children attended the afternoon; of this number, five stayed all day. A hot lunch, prepared on the premises, is provided for those children who attend the morning or all day sessions. The nursery makes provision for children with English as an additional language (EAL) and special educational needs (SEND).

The current owner has been a director since 1998. The nursery is led by the manager/owner and a head teacher. The head teacher has been with the setting since 2000 and holds a Montessori International Diploma. The leadership team is supported by a further three members of staff and a cook. All members of the teaching team hold appropriate childcare qualifications.



## Summary

At Beckett House Montessori Nursery children are sociable and enjoy playing and learning together. They are confident to move freely across the environment, whilst secure in knowing that an adult is close by for support. Leadership and management are focused on ensuring that the team works well together and the shared good practice underpins this cohesion. A school development plan highlights these aspirations.

A range of assessment documents enables the team to monitor and track children's development.

The busy schedule at Beckett House Montessori Nursery provides the children with a variety of different learning experiences across the day. Following the first accreditation visit the team have observed and evaluated various aspects of the classroom management in relation to Montessori philosophy and the prepared environment, keeping clear records as evidence. They have made changes to the choices available about where to play and who to play with, including a continuous free-flow to the outside area. This new practice was clearly in place during the second visit. The team continues to observe and evaluate as part of their reflective process on the layout of the environment and the role of the adult in following the Montessori principles.

***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:***

- Ensure that all team members support and respect the nursery's vision and its implementation through induction and on-going training that ensures everyone's voice is heard.
- Continue to reflect upon the improvements made to the layout of the environment to ensure that it meets the needs and independence the individual children

### **Philosophy:**

Beckett House Montessori Nursery provides a comfortable environment for the children who attend. It aims to ensure that the environment provides a 'home from home', where the children are happy, confident, enjoy their time and learn; each child's social development is supported as they are guided to share, play and work in pairs and small groups. A high adult to child ratio enables the setting to work towards accommodating individual needs through offering one to one encouragement and supervision. The cosy classroom allows the team to work closely together, providing opportunities for communication and spontaneous planning throughout the day. This was evident during the visits through the way the adults constantly supported and redirected children to activities. For example, a teacher quickly responded to some children's interest in wanting to build rockets by providing them with an activity which had interlocking blocks of different shapes for building.

Following the first visit more opportunities to extend and enhance children's independent choices have been provided. Opportunities for self-initiated learning and discipline have been



developed by opening access to the small outside area earlier in the session. The school's mission statement and aims are clearly stated in the prospectus as well as on the nursery's new website which, since the first visit, is now complete.

### **Learning and Development:**

The children are encouraged to move around freely in this relaxed environment, making their own choice for learning both inside and outside. A wide selection of activities is available, which ensures that all the children are able to access all areas of the curriculum. During the first and second visits the majority of them preferred to play in small groups. Adults responded to their needs, providing them with resources and interacting and engaging when appropriate. For example, during the first visit one adult was heard explaining to a child, "You may need to try another key if that is not working", whilst another adult extended a child's exploration and discovery into the life cycle of butterflies in the classroom through the use of books and guiding them to a jigsaw of a butterfly. This aspect of learning was further enhanced by the adults during a whole class trip to the park in the morning, when the same child spotted a ladybird when using a magnifying glass. Further spontaneous learning was seen during the second visit when a teacher responded to a child who wanted to build a rocket; together they discussed what it might look like before deciding which construction blocks would best be suited for the design. The child was very clear about their design, stating clearly, "It can't blast off yet, it does not have a top". And later told another child "Mega means another way to say super". The small outside area is accessible from the classroom and, since the first visit, is now part of the children's choice of where to play soon after they arrive into nursery. This small area is used effectively and includes a small area for gardening and a sandpit. A 'choice box' has been introduced since the first visit which has a selection of resources that the children can choose from to have out one at a time, including a small trampoline and a bike. Children self-register their use of the outdoor area with a number system, which enables the team to monitor numbers and ratios.

All children at the first visit joined a circle time prior to lunch, which provides teachers with the chance to introduce aspects of the planned weekly theme. In practice, children took turns in picking out a dinosaur from a box. Together they learnt its name and described it. During the second visit a specialist teacher introduced the children to elements of yoga through a story that encouraged them to breathe, reflect and learn how to stretch. Since the first visit, group activities that are introduced at the end of the morning are now more of a choice, where the children do not have to join in. In practice, only half of the children initially chose to join the yoga session, although most of them joined as the session progressed. Whilst these positive activities provide good learning opportunities that the children enjoy, the team are encouraged to reflect upon the role of the adult and how the introduction of these activities just before they start can still disturb children who are deeply engaged.

Since the first visit, trips to the park and other group activities are introduced only just before lunch, ensuring 2½ hour uninterrupted morning and afternoon work cycles. The trip to the park, during the first visit, provided excellent opportunities for the children to make spontaneous links across environments, as was observed in a child who discovered a memorial sign that had raised writing on it. He became deeply involved in touching the writing and repeating his sweeping hand movements across the lettering, consistently saying what he believed the sign said and clearly making the connections between letters and words.

The record keeping is detailed and provides staff with the means to monitor the children's



progress with the Montessori curriculum as well as with the goals of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). These records provide a variety of informative evidence through observations and photographs and, since the first visit, the school has implemented a new checklist table which pulls together their findings to summarise a child's development within the EYFS quickly. There is also a tracking chart for use with the local authority. The school supports children with additional needs, it allocates staff according to these needs and sign language is used by both staff and children.

Topic planning takes place monthly and is linked to the interests of the children. During the first visit the class were looking at dinosaurs and at the second visit the theme was farm animals. Individual next steps are displayed within the children's development records and cross-referenced to the weekly planning. Children's next steps are now clearly on display within the class for the whole team to use and include in the weekly planning lessons. All children who attend the setting from the age of 27 months have their two year old assessment in place. As part of the local authority pilot initiative, Beckett House Montessori Nursery is also taking part in a research programme that is working at sharing this assessment document with health visitors.

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

The classroom is laid out in areas in accordance with the Montessori curriculum. All activities are displayed on low shelves, enabling the children to access materials independently. A large indoor play structure is located in one corner and incorporates a quiet reading space and home corner. Resources are checked, prepared and maintained daily, ready for use at the start of the morning session. The quality and quantity of equipment is good. Since the first visit changes to the classroom include the presentation and display of some of the materials and how children are grouped throughout the morning. These simple changes have enhanced the space available and promoted further opportunities for the child's learning and development. However, opportunities are still missed for the children to become deeply engaged without interruption by an adult. This was observed when all the children washed up their own plates after the morning snack but needed adults to support them in reaching the sink due to the closeness of the art tables.

The activities offered are appropriate to meet the needs of the children who attend and this includes the bag of materials taken to the park, which contains items such as magnifying glasses and chinks for exploration and discovery. Whilst small and limited by space, the nursery makes good use of its own outside area such as by transforming one of the growing beds into a sandpit. During the second visit, the team included a choice box containing a selection of activities and resources that can be used in the outside area. Children can choose from this box, depending upon what it already out. When finished, these activities need to be put away to ensure that there is more space for others. This innovative idea now ensures that all aspects of learning can be provided for the children within a small space.

Key persons indicate that they know and understand the needs of individual children and make reference to activities children have enjoyed previously. During the first visit, when adults were not interacting individually with a child, they sometimes participated in preparing and maintaining the environment. Adults are clear about encouraging children to use a work mat and following the simple ground rules, such as returning activities to a shelf when completed. During the second visit this was observed when two children moved quickly on to another activity without putting away their first. An adult silently joined them on the floor and engaged in a conversation about choice for other children and safety. However, sometimes the limited



space around the tables can mean that children are disturbed in their work.

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

Independence is fostered through a careful settling-in process. Due to the high adult to child ratio, this enables teachers to guide and meet individual needs. Children help themselves to a healthy snack in the morning and serve themselves at lunch time. They are aware of their own hygiene and remember to wash their hands before eating. Children have their own pegs for their bags and coats and many, including the youngest ones, are able to put on their shoes and button up their coats. Since the first visit, children have more time to make choices and help themselves. Even new children, who had only recently joined the nursery, know where to find their coats and outside shoes when wanting to go outside.

The team have faith in the activities they have prepared indoors and trust the children's ability to choose for themselves. A choice of activities is available and enables children to play alone, in pairs, or in groups. Following the first visit the team have observed and evaluated the changes in activities, including going to the park, whole group lessons and lunch time. They have now implemented some simple strategies to support more choice for those children who may not be ready to join whole group lessons. Whilst these new approaches are providing more possibilities to enhance the child's social understanding and independence, the team should continue to reflect upon these areas to ensure that their strategy becomes embedded and that they are continually meeting the needs and independence of the group of children who attend.

Parents speak highly of their children's independence and feel that this is clearly a strong aspect of the school. They describe how their close relationship with the school and their child's key person ensures that they are aware of the learning that is taking place and the support they can provide at home. Examples of development included how the children are able to pour their own drinks and are keen to do things like getting dressed on their own.

### **Montessori practice: Classroom management**

Children at Beckett House Montessori Nursery are organised within a mixed age group of 27 months to 5 years. The majority of the children's learning is managed through spontaneous discovery in the classroom. This is organised in monthly and weekly topic plans, which provide the children with additional activities linked to their current interests. Sometimes these are individual or small group activities. On the day of the first visit this was seen in the 'dinosaur park', which was later extended through a planned activity of looking at what dinosaurs ate, whilst the whole group circle time supported the children's growing awareness of similarities and differences of dinosaurs. The team's long term planning documents further highlight how these activities can be linked to specific individual children's next steps.

Classroom routines are well documented and are on display. On the day of the first visit teachers discussed whether they had everything they needed for the short walk to the park.

All children who attend the morning and all day sessions stay for a hot, freshly cooked lunch. Children enjoy this social time of sitting together and are all encouraged to serve themselves. Following lunch, children who stay all day participate in a quiet time. They can choose to select a mat and lie down to rest and/or sleep or to sit quietly and watch a DVD.



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

Parents spoke highly about the setting describing it as safe and homely, providing opportunities and a wide choice of activities for their children. They particularly commented on the comfortable feel of the classroom and the children's calm manner in selecting resources. Parents also commended the setting on their communication as a whole and, in particular, with their regular newsletters and links with their child's key person. One parent described how supportive their key person had been with potty training their child.

New parents are provided with a welcome pack that includes letters explaining the Montessori curriculum and the EYFS. This is in addition to the information they receive in the school prospectus. These excellent documents are currently being reviewed and loaded onto the school's new website.

Parents are invited to meet formally with the team twice each year and enjoy this opportunity to review their children's learning journals. They see this as a shared process.

Daily checks are in place, with several documented in the classroom and on the parents' notice board. Following the first visit the team now include an evaluation of the trips to the park and, if necessary, add any activities to the children's next steps, whilst also recording any changes to or hazards along their chosen route to and from the park.

### **Staffing:**

This small team works well together. The management and leadership are motivated to ensure that they provide a learning environment for both the children and adults. Their infectious enthusiasm in striving to achieve an excellent learning environment is clear. Their reflective process of continually reviewing planning documents in conjunction with the children's learning journals is commendable and they are clear that the MEAB accreditation and their Ofsted self-evaluation document (SEF) are an important part of this reflective process. Following the first visit the team has recorded and kept clear records of how they approached their reflective practice to follow the recommendations. This documentation is linked across from team meeting minutes through to the school SEF and development plan, clearly dated and cross referenced.

This highly qualified teaching team all hold a suitable childcare qualification, whilst the owner holds an NVQ Level 4 in Management. Two teachers, including the head teacher, hold a Montessori diploma and a further member holds a BA in Early Childhood Studies. One member has chosen to specialise in SEN and holds an appropriate qualification in this field at Level 4.

A school development plan is in place. Staff meetings are clearly documented and able to provide evidence for the SEF. As part of the school's current review of their documentation they are looking at different strategic ways of linking the SEF, development plan and staff meetings in order to enhance their practice. A thorough induction and annual appraisal system is in place, which includes six monthly supervision meetings. As part of this process staff now carry out peer observations. The team have embraced this process which has included them being observed by management and also by two members observing the same lesson and sharing findings. Since the first visit, the leadership team have reviewed the induction process and now ensure that aspects of understanding the Montessori philosophy form a clear part of this. The



nursery is further encouraged to ensure that this understanding is shared with specialist teachers and other support staff, so that they are clear on their role as an adult in a Montessori environment. The school has used a local authority documentation, which enables them to evaluate findings. These documents could be further enhanced by including evaluation of staff performance in the outside area and on off-site trips.

The team at Beckett House Montessori Nursery meets the school's aim of providing a space where children are happy and confident, a home from home. They are enthusiastic and motivated in working together to achieve the reflective practice that will help them provide the best environment for the children who attend.

Name of Assessor: Dawn Nasser

Date of reports: First visit – 4<sup>th</sup> May 2014

Second visit – 10th October 2014