



# **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.

### **Clifton Children’s House Montessori**

Ground Floor Flat, 6 Gordon Road, Clifton, Bristol BS8 1AP

Date of the first accreditation visit: 13 May 2013

Date of the second accreditation visit: 4 November 2013

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

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

The Clifton Children’s House Montessori was first opened in 1989 and was registered under new ownership and relocated to the present premises in September 2012. It is based in a residential area of Clifton in Bristol and serves the local and wider community. The nursery operates from a converted ground floor flat with access to an enclosed garden and has sole use of its premises. There are three main classrooms and a hall which is an integral part of the learning environment. The garden includes a patio, planting area and lawn. The children have access to the outside area throughout the day. The premises also have a small kitchen, and purpose built lavatory facilities.

There are currently 60 children on the roll and up to 24 can attend at any one time. On the day of the second visit 21 children were present. The youngest child attending is 2½ years old. Children attend morning or afternoon sessions, or a combination of both. They are provided with a healthy snack and those that stay all day bring a packed lunch. The nursery is open during term time from 8.30 to 16.00, Monday to Thursday and until 12.15 on Friday. Most of the children attend between the hours of 9.15 and 15.15. The nursery supports children with special educational needs (SEN) as well as children with English as an additional language (EAL). It liaises with other agencies such as the local authority, speech and language therapists and the local deaf school, which supports children who are hard of hearing.

There are six members of staff working directly with the children including the owner/manager. Four are full time and two are employed on part time basis. All staff are well qualified with several holding teaching degrees and the others Montessori diplomas.



## Summary

The Clifton Children's House Montessori successfully offers the Montessori educational approach and provides children with a high quality curriculum, covering all areas of learning. There is a strong emphasis on developing children's independence through child-initiated activities in a calm, orderly and stimulating environment. Staff have a sound knowledge of both the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) framework and Montessori teaching methods and are confident in their delivery of this high quality provision. They are striving towards continuous improvement in their practice. All recommendations made during the first visit were addressed and a new record keeping system was introduced.

The setting has an excellent relationship with the parents and helps them understand the Montessori philosophy in order to enable the children to develop their full potential. The outside area is fully utilized and much enjoyed by all the children.

***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 the school continues to develop its newly implemented recording system.

### **Philosophy:**

The whole team's commitment to the Montessori philosophy is the foundation of children's learning at The Clifton Children's House. All staff are respectful of the children's unique developmental potential and this is reflected in the well-considered and carefully prepared environment. The management and staff have a good understanding of Montessori principles and are keen to share their knowledge with both parents and outside agencies. The safe and rich environment offers children many opportunities to flourish. The children are happy, settled, confident and highly motivated and are well supported by this stimulating setting, which offers challenging activities that reflect and build on their individual needs and interests.

Partnership with the parents is excellent: the staff provide literature and parents' evenings to share information on the Montessori method of education and activities that can be introduced at home. They value the calm atmosphere generated in the nursery. The staff communicate regularly with the parents about their children's progress and encourage them to take an active part in the planning process. The newly introduced recording system will give parents more opportunities to share in their children's learning by having electronic access to their records.

Following the change in ownership the nursery is in the process of developing its website. Information on the Montessori approach and curriculum, principles, goals and implementation of the philosophy are under regular review. The education programme is well considered and organised and offers a wide range of high quality Montessori and other activities both inside and outside.

### **Learning and Development:**

The Clifton Children's House offers well organised and child-focused materials and activities that cover the Montessori and the EYFS areas of learning in all three classrooms. The hall is an extension of the learning environment. It includes the improved book area and wooden blocks, as well as an interest table, which on the day of the second visit displayed an interesting



selection of objects relating to land, water and air activities such as a fan and a propeller and a tornado-making cylinder as well as a poster showing different types of flight.

The outside classroom is open throughout the day and is exceptionally well equipped with a variety of activities which represent all areas of learning.

Effective management ensures that all the adults know their responsibilities regarding the learning environment and they are made aware of any changes. One member of staff is based in each area and the whole team work well together and support the children and each other during the day.

The whole team are engaged in planning and management of children's learning. They meet each week and plan activities to ensure that the needs of the children are met. The detailed observations of the materials used ensure that the staff know which activities are being accessed by the children. The children enjoy self-initiated individual activities and they work wherever they choose, inside or out. Small group activities are on offer throughout the morning and children decide if they wish to participate. Some of the materials in each room are changed to coincide with planned project work – such as the sorting activity on offer during the second visit, enabling children to decide where the animals live – on land, in water or in the air. Throughout the academic year children have many opportunities to engage in a variety of topic-related materials and activities that support this learning.

The recently introduced computerised recording system enables staff to chart children's progress in Montessori areas of learning and to compile a detailed record of progress for each child. It contains photographs and observations and also uses references to the EYFS areas of learning. The owner/manager invested in the recording system as a response to one of the recommendations made during the first visit. The team are learning how to use all its many functions effectively.

The Clifton Children's House offers a nurturing environment that promotes effective and inclusive opportunities for children's learning. The staff are able to support children with learning difficulties and EAL, involving outside agencies when necessary. One member of staff has recently undertaken training to help support children with hearing impairment and the setting has consequently made changes to the calm learning environment to help further reduce noise.

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

The three rooms and the hall are effectively set up to accommodate different aspects of the curriculum. The art room is a vibrant and very well organised and resourced area used for a variety of arts and crafts, as well as lunch. It also has nature table with a small fish tank. Another room is predominately used for Sensorial, Literacy, Maths and Cultural activities. The third room houses Practical Life and puzzles, with a charming snack area; this has its own child-sized dresser and sink as well as a table and two chairs. The children love using it and respect it, washing up carefully and putting their china plates and glasses away.

All the rooms are light and airy and are very clearly organised. The walls are decorated with carefully selected and appealing pictures. The recent changes to the book area, following recommendations made during the first visit, now provide a comfortable place to explore and



share books.

The curriculum areas are clearly defined and the activities are accessible and plentiful. This organisation enables the children to move freely and with confidence from one area to another and take turns in going into the garden. The well-presented outside area is carefully organised with the paved area being used for painting, sand and water play, and a variety of other activities depending on the topic, weather, and children's interest. The lawn includes beds for planting vegetables and flowers. A small play house is well used for role play and dressing up, and the children have their own garden tool shed.

The wealth of good quality and interesting materials and activities takes into account the children's needs and levels of learning, as well as their home experiences. The equipment and resources available are highly stimulating for the children, motivating them to explore and introduce many new concepts – such as 'the land, water and air' experiments observed during the second visit. Another example was observed during the first visit when two girls were using the continent map, taking each piece out and singing a song naming the continents – as they were doing it they are taking turns and helping each other.

#### **Montessori practice: independence**

Regular communication with the parents is evident. They are kept involved in monitoring their children's developmental progress and are well informed about the Montessori philosophy. They also organise regular meetings and newsletters. To gain further insight into Montessori practices and philosophy parents are given an opportunity to come to a 'Montessori in the home' evening and are given the book entitled '*Learning Together*'. The recently introduced computerised recording system will give parents further insight into what their children enjoy at nursery and it will also provide recommendations for activities at home

The children are directed to new activities when necessary by the well informed staff team who offer them a choice of activities and ensure that they remain engaged. The children enjoy a high degree of freedom during the whole time they are at the nursery. They become competent and capable of decision making and have many opportunities to develop concentration and critical thinking.

The freedom to engage in a range of individual spontaneous or small group activities has been enhanced, following the extension of the work cycle, by limiting the length of the circle time at the end of the morning and afternoon sessions.

The children show impressive levels of independence and concentration and take responsibility in caring for the environment, for themselves and each other. The staff lead by example and they encourage the children to respect and support each other, showing the way for independent and self-assured learning. The children clean up spillages and manage their own snacks throughout the session. During the first visit a child was peeling a carrot and cutting it up for the snack table. Role-play helps the children acquire social skills and they are sensitively supported by the staff to work through any difficulties. Children choose where to work, with whom and what they would like to use, and once finished they return the equipment to its original place. The orderly atmosphere helps the children develop a strong sense of belonging in an environment where they feel secure.



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

Excellent communication between the staff ensures that they all have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities. Staff are allocated an area of the nursery to look after, and their responsibilities are changed every six weeks. This works well and they are happy with the arrangement. They work with all the children, not necessarily those in their key person group. The children attending the morning session are of a similar age; vertical grouping is more evident in the afternoon.

Staff interact well with the children. They observe children at play and will only intervene when it is essential and in a manner appropriate to the individual child. This is highly beneficial for the children as, during the work cycle, they learn at their own pace and naturally develop their independent thinking. Staff introduce new activities and give children effective opportunities to extend their learning; this was particularly evident during the second visit when one of the children was drawing a house using a square and triangle stencils, which prompted explanation about his whole family and a baby his mum sometimes looks after "who does not live in his house".

Presentations of the materials are given as required but for most of the time the children work independently, allowing for spontaneous engagement and natural rhythm of activity

Lunch is very well organised, with the children laying the tables and two members of staff eating with them.

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

The nursery is led and managed with the Montessori ethos at the forefront of their practice. The children are treated as individuals and their happiness and well-being is fundamental to the nursery's practice. All staff have a key person role, with the new members of staff having fewer children. Verbal communication with the parents is good and open communication is encouraged as the staff try to be available at the beginning and end of each session.

The parents' evenings are well attended and the emphasis is on Montessori philosophy and how to implement the principles at home. Parents are actively involved in their children's learning through the sharing of information. Informative weekly newsletters are sent home as well as a comprehensive termly letter. Parents will be introduced to the new record keeping system during November. On-line access to their child's observations and progress in their learning will further enhance the already existing effective communications between the school and the families of children attending Clifton Children's house.

### **Staffing:**

The school demonstrates excellent Montessori practice, which is evident through the careful planning and management of the learning environment. The head demonstrates a profound commitment to the school and is keen to maintain a high standard of education for the children that attend. She is an experienced Montessori nursery manager and one of her strengths is her willingness to delegate leadership roles to her staff and to share the responsibilities of managing the school.



The staff are highly motivated and are constantly looking at how to develop and progress. Staff meet each day to discuss the children informally and they have more formal weekly meetings that are minuted. Continuous improvement is given high priority and staff undertake varied training.

Key persons monitor the children's learning and development and the areas in the school for which they are responsible. All staff have input in the planning and their ideas are valued. The manager observes the staff and well established peer on peer observations are part of the fabric of the school and are considered to be very useful.

Induction for new staff is comprehensive and effective and staff appraisals are completed annually. Effective and well documented policies and procedures are in place.

The owner, who is Montessori qualified, also has a Master of Education degree and has achieved the Early Years Professional Status. There are two other Montessori qualified teachers, and a qualified early years teacher. Two of the staff are completing their Montessori diplomas, one of whom is also studying for Early Years Teacher status. The setting employs four of the staff on a full time basis and two are part time.

The principal and her team at Clifton Children's House are committed to the Montessori philosophy. They provide the children with a successful learning experience in an outstanding learning environment that is used effectively, and they are open to suggestions to improve their practice.

Names of Assessors: Charlotte White / Barbara Isaacs

Date of report:           First visit: 15 May 2013 Charlotte White  
                                  Second visit: 4 November 2013 Barbara Isaacs