

## **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 relevant criteria set out in “The Guide to the EYFS in Montessori Settings” (2012/14). The second visit sought to assess the progress made on the recommendations set out in the report from the first visit and considered 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.

Receiving accreditation carries the expectation that settings will continue to work on the issues highlighted in this report and will remain committed to the ongoing development of their practice. Furthermore, that they will report to the MEAB office any relevant changes such as to premises address, ownership, hours of operation or to the age range of children attending.

#### **Maria Montessori Nursery School**

Church of Ascension Hall, Beaufort Road, London W5 3EB

Date of previous MEAB accreditation: December 2013

Date of first re-accreditation visit: 18 January 2017

Date of second re-accreditation visit: 2 May 2017

This accreditation is valid until 31 July 2021

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

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

Maria Montessori Nursery School opened in 1976 and has been in the present ownership since September 2014. It is situated in a large church hall in a residential area of Ealing. Its premises consist of a main hall which is used as the classroom and an outer lobby, which is used for role-play and art activities. There are also separate cloakroom facilities and a room used for meetings with parents. The kitchen can be used for cooking lessons with the children. The large outdoor play space has a paved and grass area, mature trees and bushes, a planting area, a raised sandpit and digging area, a nature area (known as Forest School base camp), a playhouse, bird table and climbing equipment. There are also two storage sheds. The nursery school has sole use of the premises during its opening hours, therefore it packs away all the equipment daily.

The setting offers places from 09.00 to 15.00 Monday to Friday during term time, with an optional early drop-off from 08.30, for which the children bring their own breakfast or the nursery provides it. There are 38 children aged between 2 and 4 years on the roll with half the children being aged between 2 and 3. They attend for a variety of morning and full day sessions and all attend a minimum of three sessions per week. The number of children attending on the day of the second re-accreditation visit was 31 in the morning and 14 stayed for the afternoon. Those that stay for lunch bring their own meal from home. Support is provided for children with additional needs, including those with English as an additional language (EAL). The nursery offers yoga, Forest School, dance and gym as well as 'Click IT' computing, Spanish and music as extra activities. Specialist teachers attend for some of these activities.

There are seven members of staff including the owner/head. Three attend full-time. As the owner/head works part-time, the appointed manager is in charge in her absence. Four members of staff have a Montessori International Diploma, two of whom also have degrees and one has Early Years Professional Status. Two other members of staff have a childcare certificate at level 3. The nursery school supports student teachers and volunteers. Seven staff members attended in the morning of the second visit and four in the afternoon.

## Summary

This well-established and popular nursery school is committed to providing its children with a Montessori educational environment. It offers an interesting curriculum and its practice has the Montessori philosophy as its foundation. It has fulfilled the recommendations from the previous MEAB accreditation as staff now formally record reflective practice and peer on peer observations.

The outside area is imaginatively and exceptionally well resourced, with relevant materials for the ages of the children attending, and this is complemented by the extensive range of predominately Montessori materials indoors, some of which have been in use in the nursery for many years. Since the first re-accreditation visit care has been taken to ensure that the indoor resources are also fully suited to the needs of the current age range of the children, as many are under 3 years old. The team has also extended the opportunity for children's self-initiated activity throughout the day by reducing the interruptions for adult-led groups and by lengthening the morning work cycle. The children now have more time for independent learning.

Children with EAL are well supported and diverse and rich resources are used for developing language skills. By completing more extensive observations of children's use of the environment, and by using the critical thinking tool in the digital record-keeping system that the setting employs, staff members now monitor all children's progress in more depth and identify their individual interests. This has helped the adults assess the curriculum on offer more effectively.

The children's wellbeing is very well fostered and parents are provided with many opportunities to meet with staff. They speak very highly of the team and of the provision. They are kept very well informed about their child's progress and the activities that are taking place through newsletters, written reports and through the secure digital system. The staff team at Maria Montessori Nursery School works well together and demonstrates a clear commitment to professional development for the benefit of the children.

***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:***

- continue to reflect on whether there is a need for timetabled group activities during the morning work cycle; and,
- change the routine at the end of the morning to enable a smoother transition to lunch.

#### **Philosophy:**

The Montessori philosophy is very much in evidence at Maria Montessori Nursery School. The children make good use of the main classroom and the other indoor and outdoor areas available to them. They are treated with respect and the happy atmosphere is conducive to their progress. The mixed age range gives opportunities for the older children to serve as mentors for the younger ones. Both staff and parents value the 'traditional' approach that the nursery offers and the Montessori belief in the individuality of every child is also clearly evident at this setting. Following the first re-accreditation visit there is now less emphasis on adult-led learning during the morning work cycle. The adults now offer the children freedom of choice and opportunities to learn at their own pace for the majority of the 2¾ hour work cycle.

The nursery school's Montessori approach, philosophy and principles are detailed for parents in the prospectus and on the website, and are discussed with them at the regular formal and informal meetings. The team reviews the setting's goals formally every term at staff meetings; these goals promote the Montessori philosophy. Staff members who have a Montessori qualification take time to support other members of the team in their understanding of Montessori pedagogy.

#### **Learning and Development:**

The classroom is organised into Montessori areas of learning and the children have free access to the materials. On the day of the first re-accreditation visit children were able to make links in their learning as they engaged in sensorial activities matching triangle shapes. Literacy was also well supported indoors and outside during both visits as the

children were able to write, draw and listen to stories in both areas. Practical activities also took place as children helped themselves to a snack, poured their own drinks and spread their bread with butter. Washing up at the end of snack and lunch allowed the children to undertake real tasks through purposeful play. On the day of the second visit a small, spontaneously-formed group of children were learning about the life cycle of the frog. The children had extensive relevant resources to support their learning, including pictures of the life cycle on the wall. On the day of the second visit spring as a topic was very much in evidence. Fresh flowers decorated the classroom and cress was growing in the nature area.

Planning for adult-led activities is set out under the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) areas and incorporates all the Montessori areas of learning. The digital record-keeping system links the Montessori curriculum with the EYFS very effectively. This system is used by staff to document observations, and includes photographs and other records and this information is used to inform their planning. These records are enhanced by written notes and plans. Individual planning for each child is based on the Montessori early years curriculum. The children's progress is tracked by the digital system which serves as a guide and staff help them progress with 'next steps' identified in the Montessori curriculum. The manager is able to assess the children's progress through the observations that staff record on the digital system and through her own observations of the children. Following the first visit, more in-depth analysis of each child's needs and progress is now undertaken and recorded in order to make the assessment of children's learning fully comprehensive and relevant to their changing needs. This is very good practice.

Good provision is offered for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), and for those for whom English is an additional language. Staff members speak a wide range of languages and they promote children's communication and language skills very well. The appointed SENCo liaises with relevant outside agencies and attends regular training. To further enhance this good practice it was recommended at the first visit that any child with identified additional needs had their targeted plan of support included in their individual planning documentation, to help staff closely monitor progress. This now takes place and any relevant documentation is available within the child's written records.

Yoga, dance and other group activities take place during the afternoon in the classroom, which offers the children a diverse range of experiences. Music and gym are incorporated into the work cycle during the morning in the classroom. A compulsory timetabled computing lesson also takes place in the morning. While the daily routine includes these adult-led group times, more of these are now spontaneously offered rather than timetabled, and children now mostly have the freedom to choose to join them or not. As a result of this improvement the children are now able to enjoy their self-chosen activities and free flow around the setting during the extended work cycle. It is recommended that the adults continue to reflect on whether there is a need for timetabled group activities during the morning work cycle. Transition to lunch would also be greatly improved if the children were able to carry on working or could help prepare the classroom for lunch instead of being required to join a whole group circle at the end of the morning.

Lengthening the work cycle, using the outside area earlier in the morning, and providing the younger children with a more age-appropriate activities, have all had a positive impact on the children's engagement. The provision for their learning and development is now good.

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

Maria Montessori Nursery School is well resourced both indoors and out. The main classroom is exceptionally light and airy and there is ample space for the children to work in. Following the first re-accreditation visit staff members have used their reflective practice techniques to carefully review the learning and development needs of the younger children and how these can be provided for. The content of the shelves has been assessed and, while there is still an extensive range of Montessori materials for the older children, care has been taken to also provide the younger children with materials suitable for their age and stage of development. They now have an area of the room that is more dedicated to their individual needs and is equipped with treasure baskets, resources to support heuristic play, as well as other suitable activities. The team has also adapted some of the practical life and early Montessori materials to meet these children's emerging needs. While all the children benefit from these changes the younger children are now more fully engaged with the activities and are able to use more of the resources independently. Following the first visit the materials are now also laid out more systematically and are organized more effectively by Montessori curriculum areas. By monitoring the children's use of the resources, the team has been able to assess their usefulness and relevance.

The children respect the materials and, considering that some of these were bought when the setting first opened, they are in surprisingly good condition. Staff and children take good care of the prepared environment. The adults are excellent role models and appreciate the importance of the well prepared and ordered environment. The classroom is enriched by the addition of a craft area, a nature area, a painting easel, a playdough area and the snack table, with adjacent washing up facilities, as well as a cabinet with puzzles and construction resources. Should children need to sleep they can do so in the book corner. No child slept on the day of either visit. The lobby area is used for role-play and dressing up as well as adult-led craft sessions. The classroom is used for cooking unless the recipe requires use of the oven or fridge/freezer, in which case the children have supervised access to the kitchen. Lunch takes place in the classroom.

The extensive outdoor area has been imaginatively resourced and has many natural features, books, writing and number materials, as well as an excellent range of resources that foster physical development, including a large sand pit and digging area. The children have many opportunities to connect with nature and enjoy the mature trees and shrubs, planting and grassed areas and the area cordoned off for Forest School, which is currently offered in the warmer seasons during afternoon sessions. The outside area offers the children an excellent opportunity to develop their social skills and supports all aspects of their development. They benefit greatly from their time outside.

The changes that staff members have made to the curriculum offered, especially that for the younger children, is testament to their commitment to the children in their care. The activities in the prepared environment now meet the needs of all the children very well.

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

The children are now trusted to enjoy learning spontaneously during most of the morning session and the resources are accessible so that they can easily reach them without depending on adults. Their learning is largely self-initiated as they choose which resources they want to use and how long they want to use them for. They choose where they wish to work indoors and with whom, with friends or on their own. The outdoor area is now opened earlier and the children can go outside if they want to. By extending the period the children have for free choice, the team has ensured that the daily routine now more fully promotes opportunities for children to develop independent and self-care skills. The afternoon session is shorter in length, with more planned activities, but the children continue to have use of their excellent outside space during the afternoon.

Snack is taken when the child feels ready as the nursery school operates a rolling snack system for part of each session. Currently at the end of the morning the children are separated into two groups, those going home and those remaining for lunch. Staff should reconsider this routine to achieve a smoother transition. At lunch time the children help lay the table and fetch and empty their own lunch boxes. They sit around one large table supported by staff, which encourages positive social interaction and enjoyment of the experience. Respect for other cultures is an outstanding feature of the nursery school's provision. Grace and courtesy are encouraged, and as a result children naturally learn to respect others.

The team works diligently with the families to help ensure that the level of independence that is established during the day is carried on when the child is at home. Suggestions as to how to achieve this are shared verbally and are also available to parents on the digital record-keeping system. The promotion of children's independence is very good.

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

Parents at the setting feel very well supported and speak highly of the contact they have with staff. They can meet with them whenever the need arises and can also keep informed of the nursery school's activities through informative regular newsletters, the secure digital system and website. There is a parent representative who liaises with the staff and who also has the responsibility of organising events such as coffee mornings. Parents are invited to attend outings and cultural celebrations.

The children are grouped by age with their key person, who is responsible for keeping their records up to date and liaison with their parents, but all staff members know and work with all the children and can contribute to their records and feedback to their parents. All parents are required to attend at least one formal meeting a year with the

management staff and their child's key person. They have secure access to their child's records and planning through the digital system and therefore can follow their child's progress very effectively. The task of record-keeping has been made easier for staff and parents with the introduction of this system, which is now well established. Written reports, including the mandatory two year old progress checks, are compiled electronically and the management team also writes annual reports for each child. Transition documents for the child's next school are set out by the EYFS learning and development area headings and are comprehensive.

All staff members recognise the importance of working in partnership with parents to provide the best environment they can for the children in their care. The practice in this area is excellent.

### **Staff: qualifications, deployment, and performance management**

The owner/head and manager share responsibility for the daily running of the setting and cover for each other's absence. The manager has had many years' experience in the setting and co-manages the nursery as well as having responsibility for lead roles such as for SEND provision, behaviour management and planning the curriculum. Some of these roles are now being shared more broadly across the team. Staff members are given specific and clear responsibilities so that they all participate in the smooth running of the setting. As they pack away the resources daily, checks of the environment are embedded in their practice. The nursery school's policies are kept up to date and are comprehensive.

This team of seven is well qualified. The induction process for new staff members is thorough and they feel well supported. They are made aware of the policies and all other relevant documentation and are given an opportunity to observe in the setting for a few days before starting. Those that have had no previous Montessori experience on joining are mentored by the Montessori qualified teachers. As the team members all work closely together those who are Montessori qualified lead by example, and they generally have the older children in their key group. They offer guidance to others in the team to ensure that the needs of the younger children are also met. Continuing professional development is embedded in the setting's practice and training opportunities are diverse, relevant and include Montessori events. All staff members have their own job descriptions which are reviewed when necessary. The appraisal, staff supervision and peer on peer observation procedures are well established.

To complement the verbal communication that is very evident during the day, minuted staff meetings take place every week. Team work is an outstanding feature of this setting and the staff' members' commitment to the Montessori philosophy and to improving practice is demonstrated by their full involvement in the re-accreditation process. The adults strive to provide high quality early years care and education; consequently the children are confident learners and the parents are very appreciative of the provision that the nursery school offers.

Name of Assessor: Charlotte White

Date report submitted: First visit – 20 January 2017

Second visit – 3 May 2017