

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.

St. Andrew’s Montessori School

St. Andrew’s Church, Thornhill Square, London N1 1BQ

Date of previous MEAB accreditation: December 2013

Date of first re-accreditation visit: 18 January 2017

Date of second re-accreditation visit: 9 May 2017

This accreditation is valid until 31 July 2022

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

Description of the nursery school:

St. Andrew’s Montessori School is located in a residential area of the London Borough of Islington. It is situated in a church with a large hall, which is the main classroom, two additional smaller classrooms, cloakroom facilities, an office and kitchen. The nursery has sole use of the premises during the week and is in enclosed public gardens, which it uses daily.

The children are in a mixed age range setting and use all three classrooms. The setting can accommodate a maximum of 72 children between the ages of 2 and 7 years old each session. There are currently 69 children on roll, aged between 2 and 5 years. On

the day of the second re-accreditation visit 61 children attended during the morning and 33 stayed for the afternoon session. No children came in just for the afternoon. Twelve staff members were present in the morning and 11 in the afternoon. The school supports children with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and those for whom English is an additional language, and receives support from the local authority early years team.

The setting is open five days a week during term times. Morning sessions are between 08.45 and 12.00, and afternoon sessions 13.00 to 15.00. Children attend morning, afternoon or all day, with the younger 2 year olds just attending for the afternoons. Almost half of the children attend all day, staying during the lunch hour, during which they are provided with a hot meal. The setting is closed on Friday afternoons.

This privately owned nursery school opened in 1998. It employs 13 well-qualified staff, 12 of whom work directly with the children and all have Montessori qualifications at level 4 or above, two with Early Years Professional Status. Twelve of the staff team are full-time. The proprietor oversees aspects of the setting's management, but the deputy principal, head of nursery and school secretary have responsibility for the administration and day to day running of the setting.

Summary

St. Andrew's Montessori School offers exceptional Montessori provision. All staff members are Montessori qualified and experienced in working with children to promote stimulating learning. They provide high quality care and have an ambitious and clear vision for the setting. They are highly committed and enthusiastic about the Montessori approach and have excellent working relationships. Parents appreciate the ease with which they are able to communicate with the staff about their child's needs and the regular detailed information they receive on their child's progress.

All staff members are friendly, kind and caring to the children and know each one very well due to the effective key person arrangements in place. Children demonstrate independence and respect for each other, the staff and their environment. They enjoy the wide range of educational learning resources suited to their age range. This is a spacious environment with excellent resources. The recommendation made at the previous MEAB accreditation to replicate the indoor environment outdoors has been met, with additional resources now provided to extend children's learning beyond the classroom. The recommendations from the first re-accreditation visit have also been fully implemented.

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 management team should consider how they can further enhance the existing arrangements for peer observations and for the planning for children's physical development.

Philosophy:

St. Andrew's Montessori School offers an outstanding quality of early years care and education following the principles and practice of the Montessori philosophy. The staff team supports all the children in fulfilling their unique potential through their attention to detail and thoughtfulness. They trust the children to initiate their learning by following their own interests, and provide an ethos where good self-discipline is paramount. Every child is treated as an individual. The children are in a mixed age group, enabling the younger ones to learn through observation of those who are older.

The school's philosophy is well defined in writing in the prospectus, website, policies and procedures. The website provides a detailed account of both the Montessori philosophy and practice of this setting, which is a helpful guide for parents. The quality of the Montessori practice is regularly reviewed through daily discussion, weekly staff meetings, cascading staff learning from training and during annual reviews carried out by the management team.

The setting provides a safe, nurturing environment where children are free to learn at their own pace, and through observation and reflection grow to understand how the staff team supports them. Children's families are encouraged to work in partnership with staff, to contribute to the learning programme and thereby enhance their understanding and enjoyment of their children. This partnership is excellent.

Learning and Development:

The planning and organisation in all areas of the learning provision are outstanding. Children have freedom of movement indoors and access to the outside in small groups. Good use is made of the outdoor provision. Staff members are very knowledgeable and support the children to achieve maximum benefit from their use of the learning environment. Meticulous organisation of the daily routine, supervision of children, and presentations of new materials to promote learning ensure that the children have a very happy time and actively engage in wide-ranging and purposeful activities. The setting can build on this by giving further consideration of how planning for children's physical development might be even better structured. An excellent balance between adult-led and child-initiated activities motivates children to learn for extended periods of time, developing their concentration. The work cycle for any children who attend only the afternoon sessions is two hours long; they are all under 3 years of age, while the work cycle in the mornings is three hours.

Additional optional activities are French, ballet, yoga, and computer groups, which are offered once a week by visiting professionally qualified teachers on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday mornings. There is no interruption to the work cycle as these

take place in one of the smaller classrooms. Children who have elected not to participate in an additional activity can watch or can choose other activities as they wish.

Each child is assigned to a 'class', each of which is led by a full-time key person. The deputy principal and school secretary provide continuity of care in the event that key persons are absent. Planning for individual children is well organised, each staff member is supported by the head of nursery and the SENCo to plan for their key children in line with the Montessori curriculum. Long term record-keeping comprises comprehensive individual record card booklets, notes of parents' observations and their contributions to planning, and summative reports. Short term planning includes activities recorded in daily diaries, and daily observations are made that link progress with the learning and development areas of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) Framework. The daily diary for each child indicates the materials to be introduced, learning goals, evaluations and possible next steps. Key persons are responsible for this observation, assessment and recording of their children's progress. They produce a weekly progress report, help host a parents day each term and write detailed reports for parents at the end of the autumn and summer terms. A profile of each child is also compiled for parents, with photographs of their child's activities and links to the EYFS. The two year old progress check is completed when relevant and is shared with parents.

Staff members manage the one to one and group activities of their key children. Each plans a detailed weekly project with links to the EYFS. These plans are displayed for the team to share. Children from other 'classes' who join in are made welcome and their contributions are verbally communicated afterwards to their key person. The staff team extends learning into the garden on a daily basis by agreeing times and activities every morning across the team. Children are grouped by age, but as this is an open plan setting, all the children mix with each other regularly throughout the day. Adults' routines and responsibilities are suitably organised to provide for children's wellbeing, and all staff are knowledgeable about their duty of care and all share in the maintenance of the working environment and resources. The setting meets the requirements of children with additional needs by providing extra support, seeking training as necessary and through strong links with the Islington Local Authority Area SENCo.

Prepared Environment: resources and materials

The areas of the Montessori curriculum are set out in an orderly manner and are easily accessible to the children. The choice of resources and materials is extensive, of high quality and appropriate for the age and developmental needs of all the children. The environment is spacious and materials are appealing to the children, with ample quantity for the number of children and sufficient space to use them on the floor or tables. A range of good quality materials for outdoor use is creatively stored in backpacks for children to select and take outdoors. The setting's resources are packed away on Fridays and set out on Mondays. The classrooms are clean and inviting, with all the activities complete and ready for use. Resources are renewed and replaced as necessary. The adults provide a quiet space in one of the rooms should any child need to sleep (if, for instance, they are taken ill). Snack is accessible to children for thirty minutes during morning and afternoon sessions and they choose where to have it. Children help set the tables for their hot lunches and use child-sized stainless steel

cutlery and china and glass crockery, reinforcing their independent activities.

All staff members are diligent in preparing and maintaining the environment to a high standard to enable children to enjoy the rich learning opportunities on offer. Children tidy away materials when they have finished with them. They work in small groups, with a teacher, or alone; they concentrate well and persevere with tasks. The adults focus group activities on a theme appropriate for the age of their key children, for example on the 'letter of the week', and children are encouraged to think creatively. The wide-ranging resources from which the children may choose include a nature table, creative play, painting, role play and a book area. Stimulation of the children is of paramount importance to the staff, therefore the range of activities on offer varies from term to term. Children go on outings to explore Barnsbury Woods nearby and weekly to the local library. There have been recent excursions to the Tate Gallery and the Science Museum. The provision for children's learning and development is outstanding.

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

All staff members fully understand how to enable children to become independent learners and to use their time productively in this setting. They assess children's independence when they first join the nursery and follow up with group and individual presentations of activities. Once children are settled they come into the classroom by themselves, take off coats, change shoes and choose what they want to play with. The friendly environment supports children's freedom; the adults present and guide children to age-appropriate materials and then stand back and allow them to pursue activities independently. Adults observe, evaluate and direct children to the next challenging activity with praise and support during both individual and group activities. Children may choose to work in any part of the open plan environment and they feel secure in approaching others for guidance. Older children encourage the younger ones to join them in activities.

The members of the staff team direct the children subtly and effectively. Children learn respect for others through the adults' exemplary role-modelling and through stories, songs and discussion on how to look after each other. The team supports children to foster respect for themselves by listening to them, taking on board their views and praising their achievements. They encourage children to help maintain and treat the environment with respect, to prepare cut flowers, wash and dry their snack bowls, tidy up and maintain the nature table.

During meetings with staff, parents receive guidance on how to support their child's independence in the home and they are invited into the setting to work with their children on Friday mornings, enabling them to see what their child has learnt and can do for themselves, for example, putting on shoes or writing their own name. Children's independence is fully promoted at St Andrew's Montessori School.

Montessori Practice: links with parents, including reports and records

The partnership with parents is outstanding and they are kept very well informed regarding their child's progress. They have excellent access to information about the setting and weekly opportunities to visit the nursery to view their child's records, work and interaction with other children, as well as talk to other parents and staff. Additionally, they receive a weekly progress report. This indicates clearly the activities that were introduced, project work carried out and highlights of the week. Parents are highly appreciative of the expertise of the staff in managing the care and education of their children. Children's dietary needs are clearly recorded and notified to all staff. Their records are detailed and kept securely. All of the written records are very informative, particularly the reports prepared for parents at the end of the autumn and summer terms and those for the next school. Enlightening newsletters are produced for parents, they appreciate the opportunities to meet termly with their child's key person and enjoy special events organised at Christmas and in the summer.

Parents may view their child's records at any time and add their own comments via a questionnaire. Key persons are available daily for discussion and parents comment positively on the robust relationship that their children enjoy with staff. Copies of all the latest reports on the setting, for example the Ofsted report, are easily available to parents and good links with local primary schools help to ensure smooth transitions when children leave.

Staff: qualifications, deployment, and performance management

This is an extremely well-led and managed setting in which relationships between staff members are excellent. They are all well qualified and experienced in providing a joyful and stimulating learning environment for the children. Six staff members have either a BA or BSc and one has a Masters degree. New staff members observe for a couple of days before they begin teaching. They receive mentoring and support, with regular meetings to ensure their compatibility with the ethos of the setting. The entire induction process is thorough and comprehensively documented. The Continuing Professional Development Plan records each teacher's annual training, which covers fundamentals such as first aid and observation techniques, as well as staff members' own choice of training topics. Most of the in-service training which staff members have undertaken in the past two years was provided by the local authority, with occasional Montessori courses.

Following a recommendation made at the first re-accreditation visit, job descriptions have been reviewed and are now all complete. Staff meetings are recorded by a different member of staff each week and serve their purpose well and, following the first visit, the minutes now indicate clearly for monitoring purposes the actions to be taken, by whom and date by which to be completed. Observations of staff are carried out by members of the management team, discussed by this team, and the findings are communicated to the staff. Peer observations, following the first visit, are now consistently part of the setting's routine. The setting can build on this progress by giving these more structure, such as by all staff using the same pro forma. The staff team is

highly committed to and enthusiastic about the Montessori approach and constantly seeks to improve this outstanding learning environment for the benefit of the children.

Name of Assessor: Anne McConway

Date report submitted: First visit – 19th January 2017

Second visit – 10th May 2017