

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 relevant criteria set out in “The Guide to the EYFS in Montessori Settings” (2012/14).

The report does not address the standards and quality issues which are the responsibility of the Hong Kong Social Welfare Department (SWD) and of the Education and Manpower Bureau (EMB) and/or the Department of Health (DH), which report 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.

The Woodland Montessori Pre-School (Repulse Bay)

G118-119 Repulse Bay, 109 Repulse Bay Road, Repulse Bay, Hong Kong

Date of previous MEAB accreditation: May 2014

Date of the reaccreditation visit: 5 June 2017

This accreditation is valid until 31 July 2021

This accreditation report relates to the provision for children aged between 2.4 years and 6 years

Description of the pre-school

The Woodland Montessori Pre-School (Repulse Bay) is one of two Montessori pre-schools privately owned by the Woodland Pre-Schools group. The group also owns seven traditional pre-schools in Hong Kong. It was opened in 1994 and is located on the ground floor of a building close to Repulse Bay beach and promenade, to the south of Hong Kong. It offers provision for the internationally diverse range of families living in this residential area. There are five classrooms; Stepping Stones accommodates children from 2.4 to 2.8 years, Ladybirds, Dragonflies and Bumble Bees have children from 2.8 to 6 years. Butterflies is a Mandarin speaking class and has children from 2.8 to 6 years. The pre-school also has an office and a spacious indoor play area. There is no outdoor area belonging to the pre-school. Upstairs there are two rooms which accommodate children up to 2.4 years of age; these are not being considered for this

accreditation.

Children may attend a full day from 08:45 to 15:30 or a morning session from 08:45 to 11:45, during term time. After-school and holiday provision is available but is not included in this accreditation. A maximum of 77 children may attend at any one time and on the day of the visit there were 70 present in the morning and 48 stayed for the afternoon session. Seven children over 5 years of age stayed for the afternoon session. Children bring a packed lunch and join together in one room to eat it. The setting provides for children with additional needs, including those for whom English is an additional language.

The head teacher is responsible for the day to day running of the pre-school. She is supported by a Curriculum Co-ordinator, who works across all the Woodland Pre-Schools. The head teacher has a Montessori qualification and there are eight full-time teaching staff, six of whom have Montessori qualifications and of these, four also have a degree. They are supported by eight teaching assistants, students and auxiliary staff. Some teachers are fluent in Mandarin and most of the assistants have relevant childcare qualifications. There were 12 staff members in attendance on the day of the visit, including the head teacher.

Summary

The Woodland Montessori Pre-School (Repulse Bay) is a well-established and friendly setting where the emphasis is on learning and encouraging children's independence. The pre-school is very well equipped and has a good range of carefully presented and aesthetically pleasing Montessori activities. Staff members show good knowledge of and practice in the Montessori approach, and clearly trust the children to follow their own interests.

As there is no outdoor space attached to the building, it was recommended at the previous MEAB accreditation that more opportunities be provided for learning about nature. This has to some extent been achieved through the addition of plants and goldfish for children to care for, and they are now taken for nature walks. However, the staff team should continue to develop strategies and activities for children to deepen their knowledge about the natural world.

Following the previous MEAB accreditation the team has also made changes to routines to provide a longer work cycle, especially for the older children who now may take their snack when they choose. A web-based system used to record children's progress has also been introduced, and this has consolidated the record-keeping for each child and can be shared securely with their parents. The staff team should continue to develop their use of this system to include reports and to analyse progress trends. This would provide a helpful management tool and highlight children's progress across the curriculum.

The classrooms and hallway are light and beautifully decorated with children's art work, labels and murals, however, strategies to enhance the provision for opportunities to spontaneous creativity should be considered. This will offer the children additional opportunities for exploration, language development and concentration.

The school provides an education which follows the principles of the Montessori approach and environment. This merits accreditation by the Montessori Evaluation and Accreditation Board. Consideration should be given to the following points for further development:

- use of the online recording system could be extended to fully document the children's learning and as a useful management tool to pinpoint progress across the curriculum;
- the setting should continue to consider ways to extend children's knowledge of the natural world and to enhance their opportunities for creativity; and
- the management team should include the staff's commitment to the Montessori approach in the annual appraisal.

Philosophy:

The pre-school provides very good opportunities for learning and strongly adheres to the Montessori approach. This is evident in the practice and the information for parents. The adults trust the children and have a good level of knowledge and understanding of Montessori principles. Children are free to follow their interests throughout the work cycle and good opportunities exist for self-initiated activities and teacher-led craft and presentations.

The aims and objectives of the group are clearly presented on the website and in the comprehensive information provided for parents. These focus on the Montessori approach and practice and are reviewed by the management team annually or as required. Parents feel well informed about Montessori philosophy and appreciate what the pre-school offers their children; they value the calm, well organized environment in which their children learn. The adults model behaviour well and have high expectations of the children, guiding them to respect themselves and their environment. The newly implemented online recording system should provide an additional method for reviewing the quality of practice.

Learning and Development:

The Woodland Montessori Pre-School (Repulse Bay) provides very good opportunities for learning and development across all areas of the Montessori curriculum and England's Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). All classes are very well designed,

with resources grouped into the Montessori areas of learning. Planned teacher-led craft activities are offered and small painting tables are available in each class. A good range of books related to current topics are also available and all the classes provide rich opportunities for learning about other cultures in this internationally diverse pre-school. The organization of daily routines is robust and both staff and children have a very clear understanding of the expected level of behaviour and engagement in activities. In the classes for children over 2.8 years the work cycle is about two hours and in Stepping Stones it lasts for about an hour. This allows time for children to freely select activities, participate in planned art projects or join small group activities.

Planning for each class is highly organized and managed by the group's Curriculum Co-ordinator. Staff members plan a term in advance and parents are informed of the topic area and planned craft or cooking activities through comprehensive calendars.

Very good opportunities for developing physical skills, role play and for encouraging language skills are available in the indoor play area. Following the previous MEAB accreditation the team now makes use of the pre-school's location and takes children on nature walks to collect leaves, explore insects and fish nearby or, weather permitting, to visit the beach. Staff members are allocated to provide appropriate support for children with additional needs.

Prepared Environment: resources and materials

The pre-school provides a high quality, stimulating and engaging environment for all its children. Each class contains a very good range of Montessori resources which are beautifully presented in each Montessori area and are suited to the developmental stage of the children. They are sequentially arranged and enhance the order and harmony of each room. The rooms have been laid out carefully to provide sufficient space for children to work on mats on the floor or at tables. There is a selection of good quality books in each class and in the bilingual and Mandarin classes books and labels are written in Mandarin. Furthermore, resources are shared with the group's other Montessori pre-school when required.

Following the previous MEAB accreditation some plants have been added to the rooms and there are goldfish for children to care for; however, staff members may like to enrich this excellent learning environment further by continuing to develop ways to promote children's creativity and their links with the natural world.

The building has been designed to maximize light levels and to create a very harmonious space. Internal windows, a wooden floor throughout, coloured carpets and wall displays contribute to this. The adults are rigorous in maintaining a beautiful environment and the management team ensures there is sufficient time for the rooms to be meticulously prepared for the children. Children in each class are encouraged to contribute to maintaining the order of their room by the provision of cleaning materials and through appropriate modeling by teachers.

Although there is no outdoor area belonging to the pre-school, the extremely well-

equipped indoor play area provides ride on toys, climbing apparatus, a play house and sand tray. This room is enjoyed by each class in turn throughout the morning and in the afternoon.

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

Staff members ensure children are given every opportunity to be independent. They prepare the rooms with great attention to detail so that everything is at the child's level and is set out to encourage them to complete their cycles of activity. Children show independence when taking off and putting on shoes and are very familiar with the daily routines.

The adults allow children to select resources and activities and give them time to work at their own pace. They offer children the choice to work on their own or in small groups, or to participate in whole group activities. They show respect for children by taking time to listen to them and at every opportunity they reinforce good manners and respect for self and for others. Children learn to respect the environment through excellent role modeling by teachers and through following the routines. They are encouraged to clear up after themselves. At the reaccreditation visit a child was observed very carefully spraying water on a plant then wiping up spilt water with equal care. Children in the older classes are encouraged to help themselves to snack or they are given the opportunity to set the table for others and help themselves to fruit and a drink.

Montessori Practice: links with parents, including reports and records

Communication between the pre-school and parents is open and very positive. Parents comment on the friendliness of staff and the richly-equipped environment that is provided for their children. They speak highly of the opportunities to come into class to celebrate birthdays or to attend special events or celebrations. Regular parent/teacher meetings are arranged and they feel well informed about their child's progress through the daily communication diary and, more recently, through information on the secure web-based system. The head teacher collates information from each class and designs weekly newsletters informing families about class activities and events at the pre-school.

Children's progress is recorded and assessed in a variety of ways and the teachers use Montessori and EYFS tick lists effectively. Some staff members record written observations while others contribute to the online system. The pre-school is working towards streamlining these methods so that all records are maintained electronically. This will ensure that children's progress can be monitored and evaluated comprehensively across the curriculum and that planning the next steps in their development will be effectively tracked.

Staff: qualifications, deployment, and performance management

The organization of the staffing structure is very robust and many of the excellent routines, policies and procedures are shared across the Woodland Pre-Schools group. These, including the rigorous and thorough induction procedure, ensure that all staff members know what is expected of them and that the Montessori approach should be prioritized in their practice. Job descriptions are generic for all staff working with children across the group and commit them to engage with Montessori principles. Staff performance appraisals are carried out by the head teacher twice a year. Making links in these to Montessori practice would enable the management team to review the staff team's performance and set targets more effectively. Monthly minuted staff meetings are attended by the whole team.

Staff members in each class work closely together and show a genuine commitment to the Montessori approach, and they take pride in their work. One of the strengths of the setting is that many of the staff are Montessori trained and that their qualifications are from a number of institutions across the world, giving the pre-school a culture of diversity, which reflects the international community it serves.

Name of Assessor: Carolyn O J McNeill

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