

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.

Fountain Montessori Pre-School

St. Margaret’s Parish Hall, Rectory Lane, Edgware, London HA8 7LG

Date of previous MEAB accreditation: November 2013

Date of first re-accreditation visit: 26 October 2016

Date of second re-accreditation visit: 24 March 2017

This accreditation is valid until 31 July 2021

This accreditation report relates to the provision for children aged 1 to 5 years old

Description of the pre-school:

Fountain Montessori Pre-School is situated in a church community centre. The premises have one large main room and two smaller ones for the children. There is a kitchen where daily meals are prepared, and an office. The toilets are easily accessible to the children from the main room. The smaller rooms house children aged between 1 to 2 and those 2 to 2½ years of age, whilst the main room is for those aged 2½ to 5 years. The spacious and secure garden is accessed directly from the main room. Although the pre-school has sole use of the premises during the day, they are used by other groups in the evenings. The resources are therefore set up and packed away daily.

A mixture of full- and part-time sessions is offered between 08.00 and 15.00. Morning sessions run from 08.00 to 13.00 and the afternoon sessions run between 12.00 and 15.00. After-school provision is in place up to 18.00 although, at the request of the owner, only the core provision from 08.00 to 15.00 is considered in this report. The setting is open for 46 weeks of the year, and a summer school is in operation for five weeks. There are 83 children on roll. The maximum number of children attending any session is 72. On the day of the second re-accreditation visit 63 children were present between 08.00 to 13.00. Of these, 10 were under the age of 2 years. Seventeen staff worked directly with the children. In the afternoon 35 children remained on site. Of these, seven were under the age of 2 years. Sixteen members of staff worked directly with the children during this period. Four members of staff were assigned to the under 2 year olds both in the morning and afternoon.

Most children have the cooked vegetarian lunch provided, although they may bring a packed lunch from home. The setting supports children with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and those for whom English is an additional language (EAL).

Fountain Montessori Pre-School was established in 2007 by the current owner who, at present, attends daily for either a morning or an afternoon session. A manager is employed full-time to oversee the day to day running of the nursery and each room has an appointed room leader, all of whom are well qualified. There are 18 members of staff in total, including the owner and manager. Eight hold Montessori qualifications and ten hold other childcare qualifications up to degree level. One staff member who has a BA early years degree and another with a level 3 qualification are currently undertaking Montessori training. Most of the team work full time.

Summary

The team at Fountain Montessori Pre-School is committed to working in close partnership with parents in order to deliver a holistic approach to each child's learning and development. Parents interviewed during both re-accreditation visits reported a high level of satisfaction with the services provided. They particularly praised the team for knowing their child well and for the flow of information between the setting and home. They feel valued and respected as their child's foremost educators. Close links with other agencies are also forged by the team; their support is sought and followed when planning for children with additional needs. These excellent practices are of benefit to all the children and their families.

The children display high levels of self-esteem. They are confident when talking to each other, to the adults in the room and with visitors. They show great enthusiasm when using the learning resources, both in and outdoors. They work well by themselves and in small and large groups. They display independence when helping themselves to breakfast and lunch and when selecting learning resources.

The recommendations made during the previous MEAB accreditation, to establish better free flow between the indoor and outdoor learning environment, and to provide

the children with more natural materials outdoors, have been met, as have the recommendations made during the first re-accreditation visit. In order to ensure that the children's next steps of learning with the Montessori curriculum are fully documented, a comprehensive assessment has been made of the staff team's record-keeping. As a result, an individual learning plan has been put in place for each child, and links between this curriculum and the learning goals as specified by the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) are now emerging.

Where necessary, Montessori materials have been repaired and new ones purchased. The activities on the shelves are appealing, complete and fit for purpose. A cohesiveness amongst the team is emerging in relation to presentations of Montessori activities, communication amongst themselves whilst in the classroom and on how to celebrate children's successes.

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:

- the new systems implemented since the first re-accreditation visit, to monitor both Montessori practices in all the rooms and children's development in relation to the Montessori curriculum, should continue to be reviewed regularly to ensure that they become embedded in staff's daily practices; and
- ensure that children can develop their learning continuously and spontaneously, in and outdoors, for a minimum of 2½ hours on a daily basis.

Philosophy:

The quality of care delivered at Fountain Montessori Pre-School is high. The team aims to deliver care and education in line with the EYFS Framework and Montessori practice and philosophy. The staff members have an excellent understanding of the EYFS and, following recent in-house training on Montessori practices and philosophy, members of the team who do not hold Montessori qualifications are developing their understanding of the ethos underpinning the Montessori curriculum; it would be useful to continue this training. The children are grouped by age; however, opportunities for them to enjoy a vertical age range occur around lunch time, during outdoor play and in the afternoon sessions. The favourable learning environment, both in and outdoors, serves the children well as a good range of resources is available on low shelves and covers all the areas of learning. To further enhance the Montessori practices already in place it is recommended that the team ensures that children develop their learning continuously and spontaneously, in and outdoors, for a minimum of 2½ hours on a daily basis.

The setting's aims and philosophy are defined in writing and are reviewed by the team once a year. These are made available to all parents and staff via the website, in the

parents' and staff handbooks. Partnership with parents and other agencies is strong. This good practice benefits the children and their families. The parents feel involved in their child's educational journey and the children benefit from continuity of learning and approach between home and nursery.

Learning and Development:

Children's progress through the EYFS is recorded well using staff members' observations of their learning and development, which are entered on a web-based record-keeping system. The system is programmed to give a clear indication of the child's skills and knowledge at a point in time by showing, in different colours, if these are developing or secure. This information for each child is checked by the management at least once a term to ensure that there is consistency of approach amongst the team when mapping children's progress against the EYFS learning goals. The charts produced by the program are used by the key person in preparation of reports and for meetings with parents. The management believes that this recording method serves the child and the key person well as each child's progress can be seen at a glance and adjustments can be made to their individual planning as necessary. The parents have welcomed the transfer to this web-based recording and assessment, introduced in 2015, as they can access information about their child at any time, which helps them feel more involved with the setting and with their child's learning. Both the staff and parents report that they are confident that the system is secure as it is protected by a password specific to their child.

A recommendation made during the first re-accreditation visit has been met. The manager and her team have carried out a comprehensive assessment of staff's record-keeping of the children's progression with the Montessori learning materials. This has enabled them to have a clear view of the children's learning journey in relation to this curriculum. An individual learning plan, a list of Montessori materials which covers the next steps of learning, has been put in place for each child. Meaningful observations made during presentations, children's chosen tasks and during small group work are used by staff to link the Montessori curriculum to the EYFS areas of learning and development. This good practice is welcomed by the team as they feel more confident now in planning Montessori activities for their key children and in linking the child's progress with the Montessori curriculum to the goals specified by the EYFS. This new strategy is serving the children well as a clearer picture of their learning and development is beginning to emerge, and their next steps of learning are more apparent to staff. To ensure that this new system of recording and planning for children's progress in relation to the Montessori curriculum becomes embedded in daily practice, it is recommended that it is monitored and reviewed regularly across the team.

The learning and development provision for the younger members of this community, under the age of 2 years, is strongly based on the three prime areas of learning. The activities provided in the toddler room are also age-appropriate and the way in which they are displayed, on low shelves or mats on the floor, fosters independent learning. Children are encouraged to feed themselves but are supported by the adults if they are not yet able to do so. There is a large and cozy sleeping area which can be accessed by

all children when needed.

Long and medium term plans for each classroom are drawn up together by the whole team. The topics covered are chosen by the adults; however, plans are modified to reflect children's interests or current events at the setting. Individual learning plans for children with SEND are prepared by the child's key person with the help of the setting's designated SENCo. Support is sought from the local authority, and input from outside agencies is incorporated in the learning plans. The close partnership with the local authority's Area SENCo serves the team well in providing for children with additional needs.

In order to provide the children with opportunities to direct their own learning and follow their interests for a long period each day, it is recommended that staff ensure that the daily work cycle is at least 2½ hours. Additional activities such as music and drama, 'Stretch and Grow' and computer classes are offered weekly in the mornings and French in the afternoon.

Prepared Environment: resources and materials

Montessori learning materials are displayed on low shelves and by curriculum areas. All classrooms are equipped with a wide range of resources that meet the developmental needs of the children and include arts and crafts and book areas. The resources are accessible to children at all times. They relish the trust offered them by the staff to access resources independently during the work cycle. Children in all the rooms engage very well with a wide range of materials. During the second re-accreditation visit a large tray containing shaving foam mixed with different colours held a toddler's attention for a prolonged period of time. Outdoors, the children happily played with an array of natural materials available and built, with sensitive support from an adult, large structures with the building blocks.

The outdoor classroom has recently been refurbished. The resources available are of high quality and cover all areas of learning, they include creative role play, climbing, balancing and wheeled toys. Children happily play with water, make mud puddles, read books in the gazebo and wash a wheel barrow. The classrooms and outdoor area provide ample space for the children to play individually or in small or large groups.

Children are encouraged to follow and complete their own cycles of activity both in and outdoors. They are partners in the upkeep of their learning environment. Even the youngest members of the group are encouraged to help tidy up. The older children return completed activities to the shelves, wipe trays and tables and help set up for lunch. This good practice enables the children to feel valued and to develop self-esteem. Arrangements for meal times and sleeping work very well. Drinks are available at all times and the children are encouraged to help themselves. Tables for breakfast are set up in all the rooms and are ready for the children when they arrive. This is cleared at 09.30. During this period the children are free to help themselves more than once and, should a child arrive after 09.30, breakfast is made available to them if they are hungry.

A cooked lunch is served at 11.30 and snack at 14.00. Both the lunch and afternoon snack times are very social occasions. The children aged 2½ to 5 have their lunch together in the main room and the younger members of the community have their meal in their own room. Some of the adults join the children whilst eating. After lunch the sleeping area is set up in the youngest children's room for those who need a rest.

Since the first visit a number of Montessori materials have been purchased and some repaired. Good strategies have been put in place, such as immediate removal of any material that is not complete and a designated person checks the shelves at the end of each day, to ensure that this aspect of the setting's practice continues to be of a high standard.

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

Children are encouraged to serve themselves at mealtimes and to select from the wide range of activities, both in and outdoors. The 2 to 2½ year age group cannot fully benefit from free flow between the indoor and outdoor areas as their classroom is on a mezzanine floor and there are stairs to negotiate. However, the adults ensure that they are taken outdoors regularly, and the 1 to 2 year olds are taken outside in small groups. The 2½ to 5 year age group would benefit from continuous and spontaneous flow between their room and the outdoors for a longer period, especially on the days when additional activities interrupt the morning work cycle. On the day of the second re-accreditation visit the children's independence to stay with chosen tasks was curtailed due to whole group work. During the work cycle the children have the freedom to work individually, with a friend or in small groups. They happily share books, building blocks and some of the Montessori resources. They treat each other with kindness. They share in play and help each other return materials to the shelves and tidy up after activities. The adults treat the children with courtesy. Respect for other cultures is fostered through festival celebrations, books and artefacts in the environment.

Staff members work in close partnership with parents to foster independence at home and thus ensure continuity of provision. There is a good flow of information between home and pre-school via individual link books, informal conversations during drop off and pick up times, and through the web-based system, parent meetings and reports. The staff and parents value this partnership as it helps them both build a holistic picture of the child's learning and development.

Montessori Practice: links with parents, including reports and records

The owner and manager show great commitment to working in very close partnership with parents and other agencies for the benefit of each child. The parents report that they feel valued as their child's first and foremost educator. They praise the staff for their knowledge of their child and the setting for its open door policy. They appreciate the opportunities to participate in the life of the pre-school as well as to contribute to their child's learning journey and records. Parents are often invited to participate in activities,

such as during Diwali and Eid and to spend time at the setting celebrating their child's birthday. They also contribute to their child's learning by sending in pictures, books and by talking to the staff about their child's experiences beyond the setting. This exchange of information enriches the experiences of all those involved with the child and contributes to the child's self-esteem. Parents' newsletters are informative and are available on the setting's website. Forthcoming events are posted on the website and lists on which parents can sign up to participate in activities are posted in the entrance hall.

The key person system works very well as all members of staff understand and follow the procedures set in place by the management. Those who are not Montessori qualified are supported by the manager when planning and assessing children's learning. As most staff work full-time continuity of care for the children is managed well. The parents' handbook, which is given to each family when their child starts, contains information about the Montessori curriculum. Relevant policies are shared with the parents via the website and the parents' handbook. This transparent approach ensures that they are aware of the setting's expectations in relation to its procedures for the day-to-day care of their child. The manager or owner, together with the key person, visit the child at home before they join the setting to assist in their settling-in. A book, "Montessori at Home", is also given to the parents at this time.

Termly meetings with the key person, written summative reports, as well as access to the child's records on the electronic system, keep the parents fully informed of their child's learning and development. The mandatory two year old progress check is prepared by the child's key person and shared with the parents for their views and contribution. Transition from one room to another is done sensitively. Both the child and the key person visit the new environment on several occasions and information about the child's current development is shared with the child's next key person. Parents can visit the new classroom and be introduced to the child's new key person. A final and very comprehensive report that covers all the areas of learning is given to the child's next school. This area of the setting's practice is outstanding.

Staff: qualifications, deployment, and performance management

The owner and manager work closely alongside their team to support children's learning and development, to ensure that partnerships with parents are meaningful and that liaison with other agencies is effective. There is a clear organisational structure that is understood by all staff. This is a well-qualified team of early years practitioners. All staff members working with the under 2 year olds hold level 3 qualifications. Four of the team hold Montessori qualifications at level 4, including the owner and the manager. The owner also holds Early Years Professional Status.

The owner is committed to offering staff excellent opportunities for their continued professional development (CPD). At present one is undertaking Integrating Montessori Practice training, one is attending a Montessori level 4 course and four others, who have NVQ level 2 qualifications, are enrolled as level 3 apprentices. Recent CPD has covered team work and also Montessori practices; this training has had a beneficial impact on

the whole team but in particular on those who do not hold a Montessori qualification. Staff members value this CPD as it enables them to enhance their understanding of Montessori principles and philosophy and use them in their daily practice. A number of the team report a renewed interest in this aspect of their practice and feel more confident to plan for the children's learning and development in line with this curriculum. As a result of the training a better awareness of the Montessori principles is emerging amongst the team. It would be of benefit to the setting if these training opportunities continue to be made available.

The policies and procedures are reviewed by the management team with the staff at least once a year. This promotes a common understanding amongst the team and supports the setting's good practice. Staff members report that they are fully satisfied with the induction procedure in place. The job descriptions are relevant to the position held by the individual, as they are appropriately differentiated. Peer observation is in place. Staff members are videoed performing a task and are then invited to analyse their own performance. Their views are shared with the management and, when necessary, supervision is put in place. Appraisals for new staff are held after three months, six months and yearly thereafter. Management meetings and room meetings are held once a week. Full staff meetings are held once a month. These are recorded and take into account the views of all those attending. The team at Fountain Montessori Pre-School is committed to the well-being of the children in their care.

Name of Assessor: Rosie Roberts

Date report submitted: First visit – 30th October 2016

Second visit – 26th March 2017