



# **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 as well as 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.

### **Jelly Beans Montessori School Ltd**

St Pius X Catholic Church, Southend Road, Hockley, Essex SS5 4QH

Date of the first accreditation visit: 20 June 2013

Date of the second accreditation visit: 9 October 2013

This accreditation report relates to the provision for children aged 1½ to 5 years.

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

Jelly Beans Montessori School Ltd is a term-time Montessori school in Hockley, Essex, for children aged between 1½ and 5 years. It was opened in 2004 by the present owner/manager and moved to its current premises in a church hall in 2012. During its opening hours the school has sole use of two large rooms, toilet facilities and a kitchen/office. Children aged 3 to 5 years are based in the smaller of the two rooms and the under 3s are based in the larger. The smaller room opens onto a large outdoor space which comprises a decking area, an enclosed grassed garden with a climbing tree and a further, secure, lawned area.

The school is open for morning sessions from 9.15 to 12.45 from Monday to Wednesday. The morning sessions on Thursday and Friday start at 9.45 due to a church service which is held in one of the classrooms. Since the first accreditation visit the finishing time of these sessions has changed from 12.45 to 1.15 to allow for a longer work cycle. Afternoon sessions are held from 12.45 to 15.45 Monday to Wednesday and 1.15 to 15.45 on Thursday and Friday. On Wednesday mornings the school holds a parent and toddler group that uses one of the two classrooms – this means that children of both age groups attending for the morning session are combined in one room. The school operates a breakfast club that runs from 8.00 to 9.15 on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday and from 8.00 to 9.45 on Thursday and Friday. The staff pack everything away on Friday afternoons so that the rooms are free for use by the church’s congregation.

Children attend a variety of sessions. At the time of the second visit there were 53 children enrolled, with 17 children attending the morning session and 19 children attending the



afternoon session. A maximum of 22 children attend the setting at any time. Children bring packed lunches from home.

In addition to the owner, who holds a Montessori International Diploma and an Early Years Degree, there are five members of staff of whom two hold Montessori qualifications, one holds a Foundation Degree, one has a BA Degree and one has an NVQ Level 3 qualification and is currently attending Montessori training. Three of the staff work full-time, of whom two are Montessori qualified, and three work part-time. The owner has undertaken SENCo training in order to provide support for children needing extra help and she has also undertaken an outdoor learning course.

### **Summary**

Jelly Beans Montessori School is a welcoming Montessori environment for children and for their families who feel included and valued as partners in their children's learning and development. The staff work hard to ensure continuity of good quality provision and there is clear evidence of thoughtful preparation of learning activities. The manager is committed to taking the school forward and, while excited about the possibilities offered by the new digital observation and recording system, she recognizes the importance of keeping the needs of the children at the centre of her team's practice.

***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 review the layout of the indoor and outdoor environments to encourage children to use both areas.
- Assess how and when staff use the digital record keeping system for observation, recording and planning in order to achieve best practice in classroom management.

### **Philosophy:**

The educational principles and mission statement of the school are clearly stated in its prospectus and in the employee handbook which is given to all staff. The principles, goals and philosophy are in accordance with Montessori's description of the child – emphasising the need for a rich environment and the importance of the adults as role models, as well as the importance of promoting respect for others. Since the first accreditation visit the school's mission statement has been reviewed to include Montessori principles. The manager has identified that staff should have more discussion regarding these principles and Montessori philosophy. In addition, since the first visit, the sessions on Thursday and Friday mornings have been extended and this has created a longer work cycle which gives the children more time for free choice. Children enjoy self-initiated activity and the opportunity to develop their independence and inner discipline.

### **Learning and Development:**

The two classrooms include areas for different types of learning, such as an heuristic area in the under-3s' room, activities on accessible shelving in the 3 to 5s' room and creative areas and



comfortable story areas in both rooms. When children first arrive for the morning session they join circle time in their own room and the adults stay with their classes for the first part of the morning. When children choose to go outside they put on their outdoor clothing and the adults arrange themselves between the two classrooms and the outside to maintain adult:child ratios. Since the first accreditation visit the staff team have begun to introduce changes to encourage children to make greater use of both the indoor and outdoor learning environments.

Jelly Beans Montessori School has recently adopted a completely digital system of planning, observation, recording and assessment which is based on iPads used by each member of staff. It is called 'My Montessori Child'. Staff are excited about the new method, and it is recommended that they reflect on how best to incorporate it into the classroom to ensure best Montessori practice. Since the first accreditation visit parents can now access their child's observations and plans using this new system and they are very positive about extending their child's learning at home using the recommendations made.

All staff members are involved in planning continuous provision (long-term planning) for the whole school which includes activities such as block play, small world play and sand and water play. Topic planning (medium-term planning) is also performed by all staff and takes children's interests and requests into account. Every staff member has a group of key children and is responsible for observing, assessing and planning the next steps for each of their key children, as well as having the responsibility of communicating this information to parents and involving them in the completion of assessments, such as the mandatory progress checks for 2 year olds. This short-term planning is related to Montessori materials and activities and is then mapped to the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) areas of learning. Due to the immediacy of digitally recorded observations the adults are able to provide learning activities spontaneously to suit children's emerging interests and achievements. Since the first visit a written statement about the processes of planning, observation and assessment has been put in place.

The manager monitors children's additional needs as and when appropriate and has established effective links for liaison with the local authority as necessary.

The manager is committed to providing children with high quality learning experiences and feels that by adopting a 'paperless' system of planning and recording the adults will be able to spend more time working with the children and in this way provide valuable learning opportunities for them.

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

Both classrooms are spacious and equipped with a good range of Montessori materials, which are in good repair and arranged by areas of learning. A variety of non-Montessori materials is also available to children and these are of high quality and developmentally appropriate for the children in each classroom. Due to thoughtful preparation by the adults, children are able to access learning materials independently and may choose to work alone or in small groups. Since the first accreditation visit the staff have made some changes to the spread of activities between the indoor and outdoor learning environments to encourage children to make the most of both and so benefit from all the available areas of learning, and it is recommended that this continues to be monitored.



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

Jelly Beans Montessori School offers a morning work cycle of a minimum of 2½ hours; this gives children a good period of uninterrupted time in which to access the available learning opportunities. The afternoon work cycle is 2¼ hours long. 'Rolling' snack in both classrooms gives the children valuable opportunities for independence and even the youngest children competently pour drinks and cut fruit with a knife, sensitively guided by adults. They show pride in their achievements as they clean up after themselves, washing their dishes and sweeping the floor.

Children are encouraged to put on and remove their outdoor clothes by themselves with adults watching unobtrusively and providing assistance when required. The way in which the adults foster independence, respect for the environment, and respect for others in the children is a real strength of Jelly Beans. For example, they gently remind children that if they take too much snack there won't be enough left for their friends. Parents state that the staff are helpful in providing ideas about how to help children's independence at home – this is done at induction meetings for new families, and at termly parent consultation meetings, and informally through daily chats. The new 'My Montessori Child' system keeps parents informed about possible extensions to children's learning which they can use at home.

### **Montessori practice: Classroom management**

The children at Jelly Beans Montessori School are organised into two classrooms – one for under 3s and the other for rising 3 to 5 year olds. In addition, they are divided into key groups, each with a key person primarily responsible for monitoring their learning and development and ensuring that they receive any necessary physical care. Key people aim to work one-to-one with each child in their group at every session. Adults are able to see which additional roles and responsibilities (such as door duty and lunch supervision) they have been allocated by checking the weekly rota, which is clearly displayed on the notice board. Children are free to choose which activities they would like to do and may choose to work alone or with other children; they are free to join the other class if they wish to. Children may also choose to work inside or outside depending on the weather. Children staying for the afternoon session bring a packed lunch from home and eat at tables with the adults. Both classrooms have large, comfortable story areas that provide ample space for children who need to rest or sleep.

All adults help ensure that the environment is maintained to a high standard and they encourage children to tidy up after themselves, return materials to their place and use brushes and sponges to clean up spillages. The adults constantly observe the children to ensure that their needs are met – they work well as a team, changing the activities to enhance learning opportunities and moving from one area to another as the children flow freely between the classrooms and the garden.

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

A comprehensive set of policies and procedures provide clear guidelines for the general running of the school, and they are easily available to parents and staff. The school's Health and Safety Co-ordinator is responsible for ensuring that daily checks are completed. When children first join the school their parents are asked about any special dietary requirements that they may have and these are documented and shared with all staff.



Using the new iPad system, key people record observations of their key group and are easily able to forward observations of other key children to the relevant adult. Each key person is responsible for liaising with parents daily both during morning and afternoon drop off and also electronically. They also organize a termly parent consultation evenings. A report is prepared for every child by their key person at the end of each academic year and a copy of this report is sent to the child's next school. The parent induction information has also been added to the iPad system and this, together with 'The Parent's Guide to the EYFS' booklet, is sent to all parents upon registering their child at the school. A parent forum provides a link to the setting so that families can make their views known or find out about any aspect of the school. Throughout the year there are opportunities for the families to be involved with occasions such as sports day and graduation day. Parents know who their child's key person is and they are confident that any concerns they may have will be dealt with immediately. They feel that all staff are approachable and feel included in their child's learning and development at the school. Partnership with parents is a strength of the school.

### **Staffing:**

The staff structure is displayed for parents and staff on the school's noticeboard, together with photographs of staff members and details of their role in the setting. In addition to the owner/manager who holds a Montessori International Diploma, two of the team hold Montessori qualifications, two have degrees and the other member has an NVQ Level 3 and has commenced Montessori training. All staff are first aid trained and have received food hygiene training. Recent training has included behaviour management, yoga and Makaton and was provided by the local authority or private training companies.

When new staff join the school they are guided through an induction process by the manager, this includes reviewing the school's policies and procedures and the employee handbook, which clearly sets out their roles and responsibilities. Staff have job descriptions and these are reviewed at annual appraisals with the manager. In addition, the manager holds two informal appraisals throughout the year with each member of staff. Each staff member also has a training file which includes details of all training they have undertaken, certificates received and future training, which has been identified as a result of the appraisal process. The manager has identified further Montessori training as an area for development. Staff meetings are held weekly and these are documented. Since the first visit a programme of observations of staff by the manager has been initiated. The manager deals with the budgeting and equipping of the school, but any member of staff is free to identify equipment that they would like to see added to the school's resources.

The adults in this school demonstrate reflective practice and are good role models for the children who attend.

Name of Assessor: Susie Norman

Date of reports: First visit – 25<sup>th</sup> June 2013

Second visit – 14<sup>th</sup> October 2013