



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” (2012) and subsequent 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.

Mace Montessori Schools Ltd – Mace Annex

25-27 Dalling Road, Hammersmith, London W6 0JD

Date of the first accreditation visit: 31 January 2014

Date of the second accreditation visit: 2 September 2014

This accreditation report relates to the provision for children aged 3 to 5 years old

Description of the school

Mace Annex is located in West London and is owned by Mace Montessori Schools Ltd. The nursery has sole use of the Annex building which houses the two pre-school classrooms. The school is all on one floor and comprises a reception area, a large classroom, a smaller classroom, a kitchen and toilet facilities. The smaller classroom has access to an outside area where activities relating to gardening and nature are offered. Both classrooms are used by all children attending morning and afternoon sessions. The school also uses a large outside roof terrace, with carefully monitored well supervised daily access, located on a nearby building which has been carefully and cleverly designed to be child-friendly and provides a range of outside activities including climbing, riding bikes and scooters as well as organized games. Children aged 3 to 5 years are grouped together within the setting.

The nursery offers full daycare and is open 08.00 to 18.00, 51 weeks a year. Children can attend all day or a selection of part-time sessions. Forty-three children are on roll and on the day of the second visit twenty-two children attended in the morning and twenty-three in the afternoon, of this number twenty-one stayed all day. Breakfast, a morning snack, a hot lunch and afternoon tea are provided. The nursery makes provision for children with individual needs and supports children with English as an additional language.

Mace Annex opened in 2008 and is one of seven nurseries owned by the same proprietor. Two regional managers provide weekly support and contact with the school. The setting is led by the manager who holds a recognized childcare qualification and is studying for her Montessori diploma. Since the first visit, one of the room leaders who holds a Montessori diploma has been



promoted to deputy manager. They are supported by seven members of full-time staff, two of whom hold a Montessori diploma and a further two hold a recognized childcare qualification. Two other members of the team are currently studying for a Montessori diploma. A cook provides the whole setting with a healthy snack morning and afternoon and a hot meal at lunchtime. The setting works closely with several colleges as a placement for teaching practice students.

Summary

At Mace Annex the children are happy, sociable and inquisitive. Engaged in their activities and motivated, they play and enjoy their time with their peers and teachers alike. Children appear comfortable and content, including those who stay all day. The high adult to child ratio ensures children always have an adult to turn to for support. The team work well together and systems in place ensure that everyone is aware of the daily routines at all times. Children are encouraged to be independent and, since the first accreditation visit, this aspect of learning has been enhanced by changes within the environment and in the use of space, the layout of equipment and consistency amongst the adults. Children are engaged and motivated to learn continuously throughout the day. Adults closely follow the child knowing their individual needs and meeting them effectively: this was seen at the second visit through the excellent way the children managed their self discipline and behaviour.

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:

- To continue the excellent progress made by reflecting on practices as a team, including peer observations, and to ensure these become embedded across the whole provision including the school development plan.
- To work on the children's assessment documentation to ensure closer links between the Montessori curriculum and the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) framework.
- Ensure that all documentation is dated.
- To consider replacing some of the well used pieces of Montessori material.

Philosophy:

Mace Annex provides a good learning environment for the children. The enthusiastic team works well together because of their enjoyment in aiming to provide an exciting learning environment for the children.

Through their sound knowledge of the Montessori and EYFS curriculum and planning the team offer activities and resources to support the development and learning of the children. Planning



is clearly displayed in the rooms so all members are able to be consistent in knowing the structure for the day. Children are encouraged to be self-sufficient through the consistency of the ground rules for caring for one another. One child was heard saying to another "Would you like me to help you tidy this away?" Whilst another asked "After your turn could you give it to me please?" During the second visit an adult showed a child how to remove the rain water from the bikes whilst encouraging him to watch how the water moved, and another, when helping a child find where a ball had rolled encouraged the child to look by giving him simple clues. Adults are unobtrusive: their voices are soft and gentle and are rarely heard above the busy hum of the children yet, as a team, they regularly interact with the children when necessary, giving lessons and guidance and encouraging independence.

The core vision of the setting in providing a happy and healthy environment is clearly evident in the engagement, motivation and good behaviour of the children.

The nursery prospectus clearly states the setting's aims and objectives, highlights the links between Montessori and the EYFS, and ensures that the information is also relevant to the building and resources at Mace Annex. Policies have recently been reviewed across the whole Mace nursery group. The prospectus is reviewed regularly.

Learning and Development:

The children at Mace Annex have the freedom to choose where to play and work from activities available across the two classrooms. Following recommendations during the first accreditation visit the larger room now includes the sensorial, numeracy, literacy and understanding the world activities, whilst the smaller room focuses on activities of everyday living and art and creative expression. Access to a small outside area enhances the children's choice to be inside or outside throughout the day. During the day all children also have the opportunity to participate in a supervised visit the nearby park or roof terrace. On the day of the first accreditation visit, some children chose to go to the park after lunch and later in the afternoon others visited the roof garden before tea. During the second visit children chose to go to the roof terrace in the morning and the afternoon. Since the first accreditation visit additional resources covering areas of learning also featured in the classrooms have been added to the roof terrace to provide children with more opportunities to make connections between both environments. This was seen in the many opportunities outside to mark-make and engage in activities that encourage good control and co-ordination of large and small movements.

Children are confident and busy, eager to interact with the environment as soon as they arrive. Those who arrive as early as 08:00 are invited to prepare their own breakfast. On the morning of the first visit a small group of children were also busy making and mixing playdough to be used later in the day. The teacher guided the children to take turns and listen to instructions when making statements.

Following a recommendation made at the first visit, the work cycle for all children has been extended to over three hours, both in the morning and the afternoon. The early morning circle time has now been moved to just before lunchtime and provides an opportunity for everyone to come together and for the teachers to reinforce ground rules, introduce new children and present new concepts. These lessons bring positive support to the children's learning and development, for example during the second visit, with several children having recently joined the class, this gave them an opportunity to be reminded of everyone's name.



The classroom organisation provides for a variety of approaches to learning, including spontaneous, planned, individual and small group work. This was observed in both rooms, where children played individually and in pairs, and enjoyed learning about many different topics including flags of the world and the life cycle of the ant. A well-organized construction area is also included in this learning environment. Since the first visit this good practice of trusting the child's choice to play is now prominent across the whole setting. Planned small group activities are offered throughout the day continue to support choice and to refine skills; thus during an art session children were encouraged to think for themselves in choosing what they needed for their art work.

The staff are good role models and focus effectively on providing the children with skills to care for themselves. During the visits adults clearly guided the children in how to put on their own coats and, for example, further supported one child who, having completed the button frame, was encouraged to look at how to do up the buttons on their cardigan.

Teachers are aware of the links between the Montessori curriculum and the EYFS framework and record and assess accordingly; however, observations and next steps mainly focus on the progression of the Montessori curriculum. More enhanced connections between the Montessori curriculum and the EYFS could be made earlier within the assessment cycle, including ensuring that all observations, photos and evidence of learning are dated and cross referenced, thereby supporting a more holistic understanding of the child's development and next steps.

The team assesses the effectiveness of the learning and development provision on a termly basis. Previous and current targets are evaluated together with an assessment of the links between the child, adult and the environment, and further recommendations are made. This excellent practice could be enhanced further by linking these assessments and the evaluation evidence to the whole school development plan.

Prepared Environment: resources and materials

The classrooms at Mace Annex are organized in areas according to the Montessori curriculum. Low level shelving is now provided throughout the pre-school and enables all children to access all the materials freely. Since the first visit materials in the smaller classroom are all displayed on shelves within easy reach of all children.

Following the recommendations made at the first visit the team have reflected on their environment and made some significant changes to the flow and access for all children for both rooms. Firstly, the children's coat racks have been moved into the reception. This now means that when children make a choice to visit the roof garden or park they do not disturb other children when getting their coats or changing their shoes, thus providing for a more peaceful transition. Secondly, children now have the opportunity to move at all times between both rooms and the small outside area. The smaller of the two rooms predominantly provides resources associated with art and creative expression and activities of everyday living, whilst the majority of the core Montessori materials are displayed in the larger room. This excellent rearrangement, following a recommendation during the first visit now enables a greater opportunity for choice. Throughout the day on the second visit the children were deeply engaged and focused. Teachers were observed giving several individual lessons with a variety of Montessori materials, at the request of the child. Many children engaged with activities that encouraged mark making or counting. The staff team should now reflect further on the consistency of the ground rules across both rooms and to ensure continuity of practice for all



teachers.

A good range of materials, appropriate to all developmental needs across the Montessori curriculum are available in both rooms. The resources are clean and presented in an orderly arrangement, although some of the core Montessori materials are well used and one or two are incomplete. Since the first visit the small outside area has been equipped with growing beds and an artificial lawn. It provides further opportunities for sand, water and large art play. A shed has been added to the roof garden solely for the pre-school children and stores a variety of individual activities that extend opportunities for pouring, transferring and tools for handling. Adults work together in their roles, preparing and maintaining the environment. Key persons know and understand the needs of individual children, guiding them effectively to activities that will motivate and encourage their love of learning. As a team, the majority of the adults are consistent in their role modeling and application of the ground rules. In practice this was observed when reminding children to get a mat or to not disturb their friend. During the second visit adults were unobtrusive, their voices were rarely heard other than by the child or children they were talking to, they moved around the classroom quietly. This change in practice has had a considerable impact on the quality of the children's learning by ensuring that when engaged and motivated they are not interrupted or disturbed.

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

Encouraging independence and a love of self-motivated learning is a key aspect of the vision at Mace Annex. Adults aim to provide an environment that fosters this by ensuring that the children have the freedom to choose and to follow their individual needs. This is especially evident during breakfast, snack and tea, when the children are encouraged to lay their own setting at the table, and wash up. Children were observed serving their own lunch, making toast and choosing what to have with it, grating and eating carrots or cucumbers and squeezing oranges to make juice to drink. Children tidied up and all were confident enough to put on their coats and dress themselves. The team trusts the children to access activities which refine their skills for everyday living and personal independence. Children know the ground rules for these activities and confidently help themselves and get involved.

During weekly staff meetings the team reflect on and record the changes they have made to the environment and the impact these are having on the children's learning and independence. They acknowledge that the children have become far more independent and engaged to explore and develop with individual activities now that they can choose to move throughout the whole environment and space to work and play without being disturbed by others: since the first accreditation visit the team have re-positioned many of the tables and chairs, providing children with more space and access for themselves. In the smaller room the staff team are encouraged to reflect further on how they can extend opportunities in the same way as in the larger classroom.

The school's prospectus and regular newsletters support regular communication between school and home, including providing parents with information about encouraging independence. During the first visit parents commented on how they are encouraged to give their child independence at home. On the second visit parents who were new to the school commented on the guidance and support the team had given them and especially their child in finding the confidence to explore and discover for themselves.



Montessori practice: Classroom management

The majority of learning is spontaneous, with children freely choosing activities from the shelves. Planning is incorporated throughout the day through focused topic work. The work-cycles now extend to three hours in both the morning and afternoon for all children; this is due to very few distractions throughout the day and the calm manner in which the team handle transitions such as going to the park or roof garden.

A high adult to child ratio during the first and second visits meant that the majority of children had frequent opportunities for 1:1 interaction, enabling adults to focus on individual learning needs. This was observed with one child who has English as an additional language; besides the excellent use of common word cards in the child's own language, visual picture cards were used to enable the child to make the connection with the English word. Children help to prepare for lunch; helpers all wear aprons and disposable gloves. A hot lunch is served and children's dietary needs are clearly documented in the classroom. After lunch all children can rest, sleep or have a quiet time. On the second visit this transition happened very smoothly.

Additional activities such as yoga, meditation, music, tennis, cooking, dance and drama take place during some afternoon sessions, although none were available during the first or second visits.

Montessori Practice: links with parents, including reports and records

Adults are good at managing their time during the day. They interact with individual children and small groups and are consistent in maintaining the classroom and guiding children, as well as finding time to make observations.

Daily checks, including of what needs to be taken to the park, are in place and are clearly documented in each room.

All children have a key person who is their main link between the school and home. Parents speak highly of the informal, daily communication with all team members and the confidence they have in knowing that their child's key person knows and understands their child's needs. In practice this was observed during the second visit when a teacher welcomed a new child on their third day by saying "I remember what you like to play with; I have saved you the red car. Come with me. Do you remember where to get a mat?"

The partnership with parents is excellent. Parents acknowledge that they are kept up to date with their child's progress and that they have regular access to their child's Learning Journey, as well as receiving biannual summative assessment reports. Parents feel that they are well informed of what is happening at the school with regular newsletters. Parent/teacher meetings are held twice a year and include opportunities for parents to consider the Montessori philosophy and curriculum and to ask general questions. Parents felt confident enough to discuss aspects of the Montessori philosophy at the first visit, and they especially commented on the children's independence and growing confidence. All parents questioned expressed their satisfaction at seeing their children happy and confident. Those who were new to the school spoke of the informative documentation they had received explaining the ethos, routine, structure of the day and who their child's key person would be.



Parents acknowledged that the key person system is one of the setting's outstanding features. When referring to the staff all parents acknowledged that the management and the team are always there for them as much as for the children.

Staffing:

A whole company development plan enables the school to set clear targets each year. Documents, tools and strategies within the setting such as the termly self-evaluation, the clearly documented staff meetings and the monitoring of appraisals, provide supporting evidence for development. Peer observations have been introduced since the first visit and now provide further evidence for self-evaluation. It is recommended that the management team consider how they can ensure that each team member's voice is included and how this can become embedded in the setting's practice.

The team members at Mace Annex all hold a suitable childcare qualification and, following part of the school development plan, two new additional members of staff hold a Montessori diploma. Clear procedures are in place across the company relating to induction, job descriptions and appraisals. Staff acknowledge that they feel comfortable with their roles and that they are well supported by management, and this gives them confidence in their work.

Recent training and continued professional development includes first aid and an introduction to Montessori philosophy. This in-house training continues for two members of staff who hold relevant childcare qualifications but without a specialism in Montessori. The benefit of this training is evident in the way all team members work together. However, staff members acknowledge that they need to improve their understanding of links between the EYFS and Montessori curriculum.

Staff at Mace Annex are committed to providing a happy and healthy space for the children in which to learn and develop. They make very good attempts to achieve the nursery vision through their work as a team, focusing on creating a Montessori environment that promotes independence, happiness and confidence.

Name of Assessor: Dawn Nasser

Date of reports: First visit – 5th February 2014

Second visit – 7th September 2014