

Montessori Evaluation and Accreditation Board

School Accreditation

This report is a supplement to the setting's previous MEAB Accreditation Final Report, which is published in conjunction with this report.

This report was prepared following, and is based on, two accreditation visits made on behalf of the Montessori Evaluation and Accreditation Board. It considers how far the setting follows relevant criteria in "The Guide to the EYFS in Montessori Settings" (2012/14). During the second visit the progress made with the recommendations set out in the report from the first visit was assessed and any further findings made during the second visit were considered.

The report does not address the standards and quality issues that are assessed by the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted), which reports separately. Also the report does not provide any assessment of financial aspects of the setting.

Receiving accreditation carries the expectation that the setting will continue to work on the issues highlighted in this report and will remain committed to the ongoing development of its practice. Furthermore, that it 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.

Leeds Montessori Nursery and Pre-School

Wetherby Road, Leeds LS8 2LE

Dates of previous MEAB accreditations: June 2011 and June 2015

This accreditation is valid until December 2022

This accreditation report relates to the provision for children aged 9 months to 5 years.

Description of the setting:

Leeds Montessori Nursery and Pre-School occupies a former church building in a residential area to the north of Leeds city centre. The setting opened in 1996 and the current owner took it over in 2008. The provision is on two floors and is divided into three 'zones' according to age group. The Nursery is on the ground floor and has two zones. Zone 1 is for children aged 9 months to 24 months and comprises two classrooms; 'Willow' for babies and 'Maple' for toddlers. Zone 2 has one classroom, 'Chestnut', for children between 2 and 3 years of age and the 'Creative' room, which is

used for creative activity, role play and for dining. In addition, on the ground floor there is an entrance hall with parents notice board, a kitchen for the preparation of children's meals, and toilet facilities. Zone 3, the Pre-School, is on the first floor of the building and comprises two classrooms, 'Oak' and 'Sycamore', for children between 2½ and 5 years of age. Also on this floor there are toilets and an access door which leads across a galvanized bridge to the outdoor play area. The children are regularly taken on outings to the nearby park and library. Weekly afternoon Forest School for the Pre-School children has recently been reinstated. It takes place in the park and is run by a member of staff who has a Forest School qualification.

The outdoor provision is divided into areas where children can climb, ride wheeled vehicles, enjoy sand and water play, garden and listen to stories. Covered areas, including a wooden gazebo and an outdoor classroom, enable the outdoors to be enjoyed in all weathers. There is a separate fenced area for the children under 2 years of age.

The setting is open from 07.30 until 18.00 all year round excluding bank holidays, a week during the Christmas period, and three annual staff training days. Children are offered breakfast up to 08.30 and then a healthy cooked lunch and tea, freshly prepared by the chef, as well as morning and afternoon snacks. Children can bring a packed lunch if they prefer. Each room has different arrangements for children who wish to sleep during the day; the very young children in Willow sleep in low-level wooden 'coracles'. There are 94 children currently on roll. On the day of the second reaccreditation visit 47 children attended the morning and afternoon session, 11 of whom were under 2 years old. There were four members of staff working full-time with this age group, two in Willow classroom and two in Maple, all with a level 3 early years qualification and one who is also qualified to degree level. On the day of the visit there were 19 members of staff present in all, including the managers and chef.

The sole owner of the setting – who is not Montessori qualified but has a degree – is involved in the daily running of it and employs a full-time Montessori qualified Senior Manager who is also Head of Teaching and a Manager (who is completing her Montessori qualification) to lead the staff team. A further 22 staff are employed to work with the children, the majority of whom hold relevant childcare qualifications. One holds a Montessori teaching qualification and four are currently completing Montessori courses, including one at diploma level. Three members of staff have Qualified Teacher Status and nine have degrees, many in early years. The setting has a designated Special Educational Needs Coordinator to support children with additional needs who has a postgraduate certificate in children's developmental disorders.

Summary

Leeds Montessori Nursery and Pre-School provides a calm and supportive setting. Well led by the owner and managers, the adults create an environment where children truly flourish in their learning and development. Staff members have high standards and expectations of themselves and of the children, for whom they set challenging and realistic goals. They have an excellent understanding of the

children's individual needs and how they learn. Opportunities and experiences which stem from the children's own interests are planned and provide them with excellent knowledge and skills for the future. Staff members' observations of the children are extensive and have been greatly improved following the first reaccreditation visit through more insightful analysis. Moreover, all resources on offer to the children across the whole age range now have purposeful learning objectives.

Since the previous MEAB accreditation many improvements in practice have been implemented. The management team has been expanded and provides all staff with excellent support and the opportunity to gain a full understanding of the Montessori method of education. The commitment to the continuing professional development of staff members is excellent and includes specific in-house training three times a year. This forms part of a more extensive training program for the teaching team. An increasing number of the adults are also now undertaking Montessori training.

There is now a greater understanding of the importance of providing a three hour work cycle which is not interrupted by required attendance at group activities of any kind – including outside play time. Small spontaneous groups now take place and an excellent system for the children's use of the outside environment has been implemented.

Following the previous MEAB accreditation, the layout of the rooms has continued to be reviewed and improved. The furniture has been updated and more challenging activities are now offered to all the children indoors as well as in the new covered outside classroom. The garden area is extensive and easily accessed by all the children. It has been imaginatively created to cover all areas of learning and, as well as being a fun place to go, it is used as an important learning resource. The children are encouraged to keep it clean and tidy themselves.

The staff team is extremely dedicated and enthusiastic and is committed to driving improvement in the practice and fully promoting the Montessori approach to education. Regular seminars for parents are well received and supported. These foster a greater understanding of the setting's teaching methods.

The setting provides an education which follows the principles of the Montessori approach and environment. The setting has successfully addressed 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:

- consolidate the improvements made following the recommendations from the first reaccreditation visit; and
- further development of the outside classroom.

An Action Plan has been drawn up with, and retained by, the setting to address these recommendations.

Philosophy:

The staff at Leeds Montessori Nursery and Pre-School aims to fully support children's learning and development through the implementation of the Montessori philosophy. The setting's vision of "unlocking every child's potential" is the foundation of its practice. The adults are sensitive to the children's needs and skilfully encourage their independence. The calm atmosphere, the industriousness of the children and their respect for the environment and each other help ensure that they have a happy time at the setting. Its website and literature make clear reference to the Montessori approach and the value that is placed on the principles. The setting's 'Aims, Policy and Vision' document, as well as the general policies, are available for the parents to see and are reviewed when necessary.

Following the recommendations from the first reaccreditation visit, staff members have made very positive changes by providing a work cycle which is not now interrupted by group activities. The children now have free access to the garden and compulsory circle time has been dropped from the morning session. These changes have resulted in higher levels of independence, concentration, competence and teamwork amongst the children. This longer work cycle, the spontaneous small group work and being able to enjoy the garden at will have had a calming and profound effect on the children. These changes fully endorse the setting's evident commitment to implementing the Montessori philosophy successfully.

Learning and Development:

The children benefit from the broad curriculum offered to them both indoors and out and learn through their use of the wide range of resources which they self-select. Staff members adeptly motivate the children to learn and accomplish new skills. The children are respectful and those in the Pre-School greatly benefit from the mixed-aged range in their Zone.

The children are supported to become confident communicators and those who speak other languages progress very well with expert guidance from staff. Those with additional needs are very well supported and the team works collaboratively with outside agencies.

The digital record-keeping system used by staff members complements their extensive paper-based observations and assessments of the children. Care is taken to incorporate the children's emerging interests in the planning, which encourages them to become active learners as these interests are integrated into their daily activities. On the day of the first reaccreditation visit some of the children were learning about mini-beasts and went on a 'mini-beast hunt' outside to support this interest. The adults are effective at encouraging the children to develop their own ideas and make connections with their previous experiences. During the visit the toddlers in Maple room delighted in collecting and pouring water into sand, and a child in Chestnut room showed deep focus whilst running a toy car up and down the previously-built Montessori Broad Stair resource,

before then building the Stair sequence independently. The Pre-School children relished the chance to design and build their own 'monsters' and were proud of the outcomes. Staff members' planning for the children is both for the whole group and for each individual. All members of staff who are designated to be a key person work full-time, which provides the children with continuity in their care. If a key person is absent another member of staff from the same room acts as deputy key person for the child.

As the child gleans information from many sources, it was recommended that the staff team continues to adapt the materials in the classrooms to facilitate and extend independent learning and creativity, and to offer more activities that support the children's schemas, particularly in Maple and Chestnut classes. The management team has skilfully motivated the staff team to develop provision in response to this recommendation and the children now benefit from a more diverse curriculum. Furthermore, care has been taken to ensure that all the resources have a purposeful learning objective. The difference this has made was observable during the second visit – the children engaged fully with the materials on offer as they met their developmental needs more comprehensively. For example, some of the younger children took great delight in repeatedly hiding objects in boxes and then rediscovering them. The outside classroom could now be further improved by having permanent materials to support mathematics and literacy development. The whole team has worked very hard to make the required improvements for the benefit of the children in their care. This is to be commended. The curriculum now offered to the children in the classrooms is outstanding.

Prepared Environment: resources and materials

The setting has updated its indoor environment with new wooden furniture. The layout has been altered in all the rooms since the previous MEAB accreditation to fully promote the Montessori principles. All the classrooms are very welcoming and resourced to accommodate the interests and developmental needs of the age group that attend. The resources are arranged according to the Montessori areas of learning, with a good selection of Montessori materials. Following the previous MEAB accreditation, an equipment inventory has been compiled and additional, and more challenging, resources have been added. The shelves in all of the rooms are very well organised and the materials are displayed so that they are accessible even to the very young children where appropriate. The children have the opportunity to work on floor mats. The non-Montessori items that augment the provision in the Pre-School include a well-stocked art station and a construction and role-play area with dressing up clothes. Each room also has a quiet and comfortable reading area.

All the children are supported in moving to the outside provision easily from their rooms as the garden is sloped and both floors have direct access to it. The area for those under 2 years old is resourced with activities that are changed in rotation, as well as with ride-on toys and a small climbing frame. The children in the Pre-School enjoy their imaginatively designed outside area. It is divided into varied activity zones, all accessed by a tarmac path. There is a mixture of natural and artificial surfaces and children are provided with equipment for both active and quiet play, with emphasis on exploration

and creativity. The team should continue to develop the setting's outdoor classroom. The extensive range of additional materials that has been provided for the children, and the ongoing project to redecorate the classrooms reflect the dedication that the owner demonstrates in working to provide an outstanding Montessori environment.

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

Children's growing autonomy is very well supported. All the adults constructively aid every child's emerging independence across all the age groups. The children are encouraged by the staff and their carefully prepared environment to be able to choose activities to work with on their own or in small groups. On the day of the first reaccreditation visit this was evident in the Pre-School: two children worked together with the Montessori Baric Tablets – one was blindfolded to enhance their baric sense and the other was playing the role of 'teacher'. Others were working with the literacy materials or designing and building their 'monsters'. Another example of their capabilities is shown at meal times – the children help lay the tables, help themselves to their food and clear up afterwards, supported where appropriate by the attentive adults who sit and eat with them. All meals are now taken in the children's classrooms, and a rolling snack is now available in the Pre-School, giving the children greater autonomy and a chance to demonstrate their competence. While the younger children need more support, they are still encouraged to make independent choices. They are able to follow their own daily routines and all are given plenty of time and freedom to repeat activities and develop their confidence. This is now a very strong aspect of the setting's practice.

Montessori Practice: links with parents, including reports and records

Relationships with the parents are excellent. Their views are regularly sought and they are encouraged to comment on and feed into the setting's ongoing improvement plan as well as to offer insight into their children's learning and changing interests. In addition to providing them with extensive information on their child's progress, the secure digital recording system is also used by the staff team to communicate daily with the younger children's carers. The daily verbal information that is also given to parents across the setting is highly valued by them and helps ensure that the care given to each child is appropriate and consistent. As well as parent meetings to discuss their children's progress, regular seminars are offered to parents to enhance their understanding of the Montessori method of education. Social events and newsletters also help forge effective links between parents and staff. There is a strong sense of community and collaboration, which greatly benefits the children. The completion of the mandatory two year old progress check is the responsibility of the child's key person and a designated member of staff who liaises with outside agencies and the parents to ensure that the information gathered is comprehensive. The regular assessments and summative transition reports are all informative and extensive, and procedures for these are well embedded in practice.

It was recommended during the first reaccreditation visit that the area designated for 'critical insight' in the digital recording system should be used regularly to help improve the quality of the staff's observations across the setting, and to encourage further analysis of the children's learning. The quality of observations has now improved considerably. All the staff team are now motivated to think clearly about learning objectives and are more discerning in planning accurately for the children's next steps.

Family books have also been introduced very successfully across the setting, to provide the children with a point of reference with their families when away from home. It was a pleasure to see the children sharing their family books with the adults and their peers during the second visit.

Staff: qualifications, deployment, and performance management

The Senior Manager (Head of Teaching) is inspirational in the way she skilfully motivates the parents and staff to fully embrace the Montessori method of education. She, in turn, has the full support of the owner and the other Manager. They work collaboratively to ensure the best outcomes for children and their families. The positive working relationships they generate are evident across the team. The strong culture of committing to continuing professional development gives each staff member the opportunity and confidence to work with the Montessori approach; each is offered paid leave to undertake training in Montessori practice. The setting is well connected to the regional Montessori Schools Association's support and training opportunities, and a rolling program for offering staff external Montessori training is embedded. This is highly commendable.

Performance management procedures are clear as supervision, appraisals and peer observations are well established. New staff members are fully supported by the management team and job descriptions include a section on Montessori practice. A consistent approach to classroom management is evident across the setting.

The staff team at Leeds Montessori Nursery and Pre-School is committed to providing the children with an education based on the Montessori philosophy and is wholly dedicated to their well-being. The whole team's attitude to changing some elements of practice between the visits was inspiring and a credit to the exceptional leadership of this outstanding Montessori setting.

Name of Assessor: Charlotte White

Date of first visit: 27 June 2018

Date of second visit: 15 October 2018

Date report submitted: First visit – 30 June 2018

Second visit – 16 October 2018