

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.

Lemon Tree Montessori Nursery

St. Mary’s Church Hall, Purley Oaks Road, Sanderstead, Croydon CR2 0NY

Date of previous MEAB accreditation: June 2014

Date of first reaccreditation visit: 13 March 2017

Date of second reaccreditation visit: 7 June 2017

This accreditation is valid until December 2021

This accreditation report relates to the provision for children aged 2 to 5 years

Description of the nursery:

Lemon Tree Montessori Nursery is located in a residential area of the London Borough of Croydon. It is situated in a church hall and comprises a spacious main classroom with an adjoining smaller classroom, a staff room/office, a kitchen, store rooms and cloakroom facilities. The fenced outdoor area is adjacent to the classrooms and has paved and grass areas. The nursery has sole use of the premises during the week and packs away all its resources on a Friday, so that others may access the building.

All the children across the mixed age range share all areas of the learning environment. The setting accommodates a maximum of 60 children each session. There are currently 82 children on roll, all between 2 and 5 years of age. On the day of the second reaccreditation visit 51 children attended the morning session and 31 the afternoon. The

nursery supports children with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those for whom English is an additional language. It receives support from the local authority's early years team and specialists, as required.

The setting is open five days a week for 50 weeks per year. Morning sessions run between 09.00 and 13.00, and afternoon sessions 13.00 to 15.00. A breakfast club runs from 07.30 to 09.00 and 'after-school' provision is until 18.00. Children can attend all year round or just term times for morning, afternoon or all day sessions, with the majority attending 09.00 to 15.00. Only one child currently attends just for the afternoon session. For those who stay over the lunch period a hot meal is provided, or children can bring in a packed lunch from home. This accreditation only covers the core hours of 09.00 to 15.00 and the term time provision.

This privately owned nursery opened in 1993. It moved to its current location in 2006 and its company came under new ownership in 2016 to become one of four nurseries in the same chain. It employs 14 staff, 13 of whom work directly with the children. The appointed Head Teacher and Deputy manage the setting on a day to day basis during term time. Another member of staff manages the nursery in their absence; she is not Montessori trained. Six staff members have Montessori qualifications, including the Deputy and the Head Teacher, who also has a Bachelor and Master's degree in early years as well as Early Years Professional Status. Six staff members attend full-time to cover the core hours. The remainder of the team works a combination of part-time hours. Eleven staff members attended the morning session on the day of the second visit, eight attended for the afternoon. The proprietors oversee admissions and some aspects of management. A peripatetic teacher attends each week to offer 'playball' sessions in the garden.

Summary

This very well managed setting has undergone many changes since the previous MEAB accreditation and within the past year. The newly-formed team of proprietors, management and staff are working together effectively to provide a happy learning environment for the children, and the leaders are directing the significant enhancement of the setting's Montessori practice. They have also introduced an efficient and secure web-based system for planning, assessment and recording of children's progress, which has been successfully implemented.

The spacious accommodation is used well to enable children to move freely and easily around the setting, and they can choose to play indoors or outside for much of the day. They benefit from having new child-sized furniture and many new Montessori materials.

The partnership with parents is strong and they are highly appreciative of the efforts of the staff to bring about significant improvement for the benefit of the children. Parents state that staff members are knowledgeable and supportive, always having time for them and the needs of their children. The setting has met the recommendations made in the previous MEAB accreditation by encouraging all staff

to work with all the children. This has enabled the whole team to build a good understanding of the children's developmental needs, to form bonds with them and to all be involved in planning for 'next steps' in the children's learning and development.

The setting has successfully implemented all the recommendations from the first reaccreditation visit. Both the website and the prospectus have more information on Montessori philosophy and how the Montessori approach works in practice. The quantity of Montessori materials accessible to the children has been increased. Further Montessori materials have been purchased and the area set aside for activities for everyday living has been doubled in size. Plastic resources have, where possible, been replaced with natural materials. Teamwork has improved with the introduction of the Montessori philosophy into the staff induction process and training. Montessori training has been provided for staff members as yet unqualified in Montessori teaching. Peer observations have also been successfully implemented. The smaller classroom is now available for staff to use for focused activities with the children and this has had a positive effect in reducing the number of staff and children in the main classroom at any one time, giving more space for teaching and learning across the setting.

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 embed the changes made following the first reaccreditation visit; and
- continue to broaden the outdoor learning opportunities, in particular those that help develop children's physical skills.

Philosophy:

Lemon Tree Montessori Nursery offers its mixed age group Montessori provision alongside many other non-Montessori materials. Staff members ensure that each child feels secure and free to learn within the prepared environment. An effective key person system enables the adults to follow the interests of each child closely and to support them to become motivated, curious and independent learners. They trust the children to develop self-discipline and initiative in their learning. The philosophy is closely aligned with the Montessori approach and the adults understand their role of working alongside and for the children to engender their sense of belonging and involvement. The Montessori trained staff members have an excellent understanding of the role of the adult in implementing the Montessori principles.

The prospectus and website outline the philosophy and principles of the Montessori method of education and provide an overview of the curriculum areas. The easy to use

website provides clear information to parents on practical issues and Montessori practice in reference to the curriculum. Regular meetings are held between the management team and the nursery proprietors to discuss all areas of practice. The Head Teacher monitors the quality of Montessori practice and the whole team also meets regularly to reflect upon the principles and goals of the nursery.

Learning and Development:

The provision for children's learning and development is very good. Following the first reaccreditation visit all the children benefit from having access to the full range of Montessori materials and their increased use of the smaller classroom has provided more space for teaching and learning indoors. The spacious outdoor area is very well used as all children have access to it throughout the duration of the sessions. Following the first visit a more structured approach is now taken to the amount of time children spend outdoors and to offering them some focused, adult-led group activities outdoors, which has improved the levels of staff engagement with the children. The setting now needs to broaden the opportunities for children's learning outdoors.

All teaching staff work with all the children. The distribution of adults across the setting changes daily on a rota system and staff members introduce activities to the children based on their knowledge of the child's individual interests, needs and stage of development. They record their observations. All staff members are involved in the long term planning for all the children, which outlines the topics for each half term based upon, for example, the seasons, celebrations and the interests of the children. This planning incorporates Montessori curriculum areas. Short term planning is also discussed collectively at weekly staff meetings; this is then finalised and disseminated by the Head Teacher.

Key persons co-ordinate the individual planning for their key children, taking into consideration their colleagues' input. This individual planning is based on their regular observations and assessments and provides for a stimulating learning experience for each child. It follows the child's progression through the Montessori materials and reflects their individual needs and interests. It also links the Montessori areas of learning with the Early Years Foundation Stage learning goals. The key persons are responsible for ensuring that the children's records are maintained. They assess and record the child's learning and progress effectively using the web-based system. Parents have individual, secure passwords for access to this system, which enable them to see the latest weekly observations of their child, news updates, articles and ideas for supporting their child's learning and independence at home.

The 2½ hour morning work cycle begins at 09.00, followed by adult-led groups at 11.30 for all the children. A snack table is available throughout the session so that the children are free to choose when they would like their snack. They help to cut up fruit, serve themselves, pour their own drinks and place their crockery in a bowl for washing. At 11.45 children tidy the classroom and prepare the lunch tables together with staff. The afternoons offer another but shorter work cycle for those who stay until 15.00 and include a 'playball' session once a week for some children, led by the visiting instructor.

The assistance offered to those identified with additional needs is a strength of this setting. Their requirements are met through the implementation of supportive action plans and through the provision of appropriate materials. The setting benefits from the guidance and expertise of other professionals such as occupational and speech and language therapists. Dietary requirements are clearly documented. The management regularly and effectively reviews all aspects of the provision and all children's records.

Prepared Environment: resources and materials

This is a very well-equipped Montessori setting. Most of the Montessori resources are at one end of the main classroom, with the Montessori activities for everyday living at the other end. The centre of the room contains a wide range of toys for construction, art and design activities, a sand box and a new home corner. These resources invite collaborative play and although they can therefore generate high levels of noise, which can be distracting for children nearby who are trying to concentrate on individual activities, this provision is managed by staff to minimize the disruption. Following the first reaccreditation visit the range of Montessori materials accessible to the children has been significantly increased and all are complete, clean and ready for use. There is sufficient space for children to use them. Materials are appropriate to the developmental needs of the children and the resources for the youngest are in a clearly defined area. The activities for everyday living are extensive in quantity for the number of children in attendance. They also now benefit from having more natural materials, including a mud kitchen outdoors.

The children can access the outdoor provision independently from the main room. The outdoor equipment is packed away at the end of each day so is lightweight and it is age-appropriate. It includes slides, bikes, trikes, two playhouses, sand, water, painting, number lines and a book area, all of which the children use independently, with staff available to offer support. Further opportunities for outdoor learning should be offered, in particular those that help develop children's physical skills.

Children who need to sleep after lunch do so in the smaller classroom on foldaway beds. A daily rota indicates specific duties and responsibilities for staff, incorporating daily checks for the indoor and outside areas, preparation and supervision of snacks and serving of lunches. All staff share responsibility for the upkeep of the prepared environment and its resources, and they replace materials as necessary. The Montessori materials are maintained by the Montessori qualified staff.

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

Staff members facilitate the children's independence very well and offer appropriate guidance and help. Children self-register on arrival and are free to choose their own activities. Following the first reaccreditation visit the children can access all the activities for everyday living independently. They work with the learning resources for as long as

they wish and then return them to the shelves. The adults show children how to respect and take care of their learning environment and provide the tools to enable them to accomplish this. Children help tidy the environment and enjoy setting the tables for lunch. Practitioners sit with the children as they eat lunch and encourage them to feed themselves and clear away their plate or lunch box when they have finished their meal.

The adults support children's freedom to work individually or in groups and they maintain a very good balance between child-initiated and adult-led activities. They redirect children to new activities based on their observations of what support the child needs and according to their individual stage of development. Staff role-modeling is good. Discussions of ground rules are incorporated into the planning and introduced during small group circle times so that children are able to learn about the consequences of their actions and the feelings of others. Staff members provide children with the verbal skills to resolve conflicts. They also promote respect through the celebration of the festivals and traditions of the diverse range of cultures of the children, to enable them to understand and show tolerance of each other's differences and to celebrate their own identity. The adults work hard to build children's self-esteem and respect for each other. They set clear boundaries that provide children with a framework of social skills, they encourage them to express their needs and allow them to experiment. This is excellent practice.

Montessori Practice: links with parents, including reports and records

The partnership with parents is very strong. Staff members are available to communicate with parents throughout the day and regularly explain to parents their children's progress towards independence in the nursery, encouraging them to replicate this with their child at home. The setting is developing a new system of regular parent/teacher meetings to provide key persons and parents with the opportunity to discuss individual children's interests, needs and progress in greater depth. The mandatory two year old progress check is completed and shared with parents and a high quality transition report is prepared when the child leaves the setting. All parents can monitor their child's progress through the web-based recording system, which is also used for two-way communication between home and nursery.

A regularly updated noticeboard informs parents about events and the weekly topics. A half-termly informative newsletter details topics, special occasions and staff and other changes at the nursery. The nursery fully respects and supports diversity and liaises closely with families, communicating with them about home life. They involve those who have a child with additional needs with decision-making and planning processes, and in their work with outside agencies. On the second reaccreditation visit parents highly praised the commitment and dedication of the staff to providing for the needs of their children.

Staff: qualifications, deployment, and performance management

There have been significant staff changes since the previous MEAB accreditation and

