

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.

The Little Children’s House

3 Greenfield Drive, South Brent, Devon TQ10 9QF

Date of first accreditation visit: 7 February 2017

Date of second accreditation visit: 26 April 2017

This accreditation is valid until 31 July 2021

This accreditation report relates to the provision for children aged from birth to 4 years old

Description of the childminding setting:

The Little Children’s House is located in a family bungalow, set within a residential area of a village. It was registered at these premises in August 2014. The children use the large open-plan kitchen, conservatory and the back garden. They are able to sleep, if they wish, in either a cot or floor bed in a separate quiet room. The indoor area is bright and well-designed, with wooden flooring and plenty of floor space. The kitchen contains a snack table with appropriately-sized chairs and stools. There is a dedicated potty and nappy changing area with hand washing facilities. A book corner with a choice of seating is located alongside shelving containing Montessori materials and art activities. The conservatory is stocked with a range of cultural and practical life activities stored on shelves and in floor boxes, wooden toys, a large art easel and fish tank.

The children enter the setting through the front door and hang their coats on named hooks. They can reach the garden easily from the kitchen and are free to take learning materials outdoors from inside. The garden provides a variety of surfaces; flat wooden decking, a grassed area and concrete pathway which are gently sloping. A raised garden plot, climbing frame and slide are available, together with a wildlife pond which is in a separate fenced-off area. The outside area is partially covered with shade during hot weather. The setting is within easy walking distance of a playground, a nature reserve and countryside. The children are taken on trips to a local farm, nature and tourist attractions, the library and local bookshops.

The setting is open for 46 weeks per year from 08.00 to 17.00, Monday to Thursday. It is registered to take up to six children aged between birth and 7 years. Currently six children are enrolled, with three attending each day in different groups of three. All are currently below 4 years of age. On the accreditation visits three children attended for the full day.

Snack is provided in the morning and afternoon and a home-cooked lunch is prepared daily. The owner works closely with parents and outside agencies to provide for any child's additional needs. She is a qualified Montessori directress with an honours degree. She works alone, but has emergency cover arrangements in place and student teachers can attend the setting, with one being present on the day of the first visit.

Summary

The Little Children's House provides a warm, caring and supportive Montessori childminding setting for children and their families. The owner is a dedicated Montessorian who works collaboratively with the parents for the benefit of the children in her care. Parents are appreciative of the level of practical support, parenting strategies and Montessori insights provided by the owner, who fully promotes the home/setting partnership by her clear lines of communication.

The whole day, including the morning work cycle, has a gentle rhythm that reflects the children's needs. The well-established routines are designed to promote and develop their independence and self-confidence; many examples of this were observed during both accreditation visits. Mealtimes are peaceful and pleasurable, providing many opportunities for learning, positive interaction and communication. The owner knows and understands the children very well and is able spontaneously to adapt her Montessori provision to ensure that they work towards their potential. She is a very effective role-model, communicating clearly and respectfully at all times.

Although a sole practitioner, the owner works very hard at networking with the local early years and childminding groups and represents Montessori childminders on the Montessori Schools Association (MSA) National Advisory Council as Deputy Childminders Chair.

The rich Montessori environment is carefully prepared to cater for the interests of each child with an excellent range of appropriate activities both in and outdoors. Following recommendations made during the first visit, the owner has enhanced the learning opportunities in the outdoor area; the range of activities has been extended to include more resources for numeracy, literacy and for balancing, fine motor control and role-play. The owner has also improved how she records children's learning and development by using short notes and photos to capture significant moments during the day. The children are now also involved in this process, taking photos of their activities, and their comments are included in their Learning Journeys. This improvement has been remarkably effective, and the records now fully reflect each child's holistic development as well as their specific achievements. These changes in the recording process have also helped the owner establish regular ongoing self-evaluation techniques, which she now uses to reflect positively on her practice.

The setting provides an education in accordance with the principles of the Montessori approach and environment and merits accreditation by the Montessori Evaluation and Accreditation Board.

- It is recommended that the owner continues to reflect on her practice, using recently adopted strategies, in order to ensure that her very high standards are maintained in all areas.

Philosophy:

The children attending The Little Children's House benefit from a high quality, individualised Montessori approach which offers them a rich variety of activities and experiences in a caring, thoughtfully-created home setting. They are guided by the insightful and creative owner who responds sensitively and appropriately to their specific needs. She uses her Montessori understanding and knowledge of child development to 'follow the child'. The whole day has a gentle pace, which allows each child the time to follow their interests and inclinations within an ordered Montessori environment. Mealtimes are a particular example of how many aspects of child development are respected and skillfully promoted using Montessori principles. The furniture and tableware have been carefully selected to enable children to use them independently. The children take turns to serve themselves, and they tidy up once they have finished, in their own time. Conversation is gently encouraged by the owner and moments of silence respected. An ordered routine, with a few clear and specific ground rules, enables the children to thrive in an atmosphere of respectful acceptance and to develop secure levels of self-confidence and self-discipline.

The philosophy and Montessori approach of The Little Children's House is clearly detailed on its well-produced website. The owner receives professional support from the local childminding network and the national Montessori childminders network, and she acknowledges the importance of objective review of practice. She is clearly a highly motivated Montessorian who strives for excellence.

Learning and Development:

The Little Children's House is a rich and enabling learning environment, well-equipped with an excellent range of appropriately selected resources that are well presented and accessible to the children. Each area of learning is clearly delineated and a high level of practical life activity is effectively embedded into the daily routines; these actively promote each child's independence. The children are free to move around the setting both indoors and outside and have plenty of floor and table space on which to work and play. The owner monitors the children's behaviour and engagement throughout the day, gently guiding as necessary, offering choices in a calm, respectful manner and using positive language clearly and effectively. She skilfully engages each child at their own level of development, based on her observations and knowledge, and takes every opportunity to advance and promote their learning by her careful use of language or role-modelling to aid their thinking. She offers simple choices and clear statements to guide actions very effectively. She also takes time to listen and wait respectfully for each child to come to their own conclusions. Her gentle approach is guided entirely by her strongly-held Montessori principles. The daily routine is well understood by the children.

The owner chooses broad topics linked to seasons and selects individual continents in topic planning, which gives ample scope to follow the children's individual interests. For example, 'harvest and thanksgiving' in the autumn included a focus on North America and on making pumpkin chutney. Spring topics included Chinese New Year, with a visit to a local Chinese supermarket and trips to see hens and cockerels at a local farm. During the first accreditation visit the children's current interest in trains was skilfully being sustained by the provision of wheeled trollies, train stories with puppets and a small world train track, as well as by a walk in the afternoon past a real train track and by playing on the local playground's train. An older child's interest in sounds was also very well supported throughout the day, including with games of I-spy and alphabet letter-shaped snacks. During the second visit the children's interests had moved on to farm vehicles, pets and a variety of science activities. The owner is particularly skilled at identifying children's current areas of interest and is able to respond quickly and effectively to a special sensitivity or burst of interest. Most days they go out on local trips and those further afield are also organised regularly.

Planning for individual children includes targets and possible next steps. This is set out according to the learning and development areas of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) and is kept within the planning folder. Short term planning is developed from the owner's close and skilful observation. Significant moments and individual children's commentary are now securely and very effectively captured and then reflected on later to identify and record children's progress. For example, during the second visit the owner recorded how a child felt when a carrot pesto sauce she had helped make for lunch was liked by her peers. The owner also completes learning and development observations for each child. These show how the child's activity links with the EYFS goals, they highlight EYFS Characteristics of Effective Learning and also include a section for Montessori reflections. There is also space for next steps and parents' comments. These written observations, together with photos and notes taken, are stored in the child's individual Learning Journey, which is shared with their family.

Prepared Environment: resources and materials

The areas used by the children have been carefully considered and are maintained with great diligence. In the spacious kitchen area Montessori sensorial, literacy, numeracy and creative activities are displayed effectively on appropriate shelving and reflect accurately the current interests and skill levels of the children – the later numeracy and literacy materials for example are placed at slightly higher levels. All materials are clean, complete and accessible. Additional materials are introduced to extend development as necessary – such as a matching and pairing vehicles activity. The book area with its comfortable chair and range of books and puppets is well used by all. A small tent is also available. Children have space to work on the floor and at the table as well as to manoeuvre small ride-on toys if the weather is unfavourable. A wide range of cultural activities – including continent boxes, world puzzle map and globes – is located in the conservatory, together with musical instruments, construction toys, puzzles, a train track, the easel, and opening and closing activities along with other resources to promote fine motor development,.

The partly-decked, gently sloping outside area presents many opportunities for children to develop their physical skills. There is a raised bed where fruits, flowers, vegetables and herbs are grown and harvested by the children, and a specially designed mud kitchen with an extensive range of intriguing utensils. These provide a rich range of exploratory activities for the children. The design of the mud kitchen with two separate bowls is distinctive and entirely appropriate and was well used by the children during both accreditation visits. A low level sand tray is available and there is a small trampoline, tent, tunnel, scooter and ride-ons. Following the first visit, the owner has built on her good practice and individual knowledge of the children to extend the number, sorting and literacy opportunities outside, to increase the range of gardening equipment and to introduce a wider variety of mud kitchen utensils and interesting science activities into the garden area. These new resources were in full use during the second visit. Systems to organise storage of the scooter, small trike and wheeled trolleys were also working well and helped the children to maintain the order of their outside environment.

Practical life activities are embedded into the whole routine of the day in this setting. The children use cloths and dustpan and brush confidently to clear up. They rake the grass to remove moss and wash and polish the glass windows. This suitably laid out Montessori environment fully provides for the children's individual needs, it fosters their spontaneous learning and development and their independence.

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

Promoting each child's skills of independence is a real strength of this setting and it is clear that the owner understands that a child needs time to process information, make decisions, organise an action and respond. Her whole approach reflects this understanding as time and contingency are built into the routines and practices of each day.

From the moment the children arrive their independence is respected and nourished, following Montessori principles. When they are able, they can hang up their coats on arrival and change into outdoor clothes ready to go outside. Opportunities to move around independently indoors and outside are well supported as the owner ensures that each child's freedom is promoted. They can choose to sleep in either a cot or low bed if they wish. The children can work together or alone; they show a high level of focus and engagement. The morning work cycle enables them to make choices of activity until lunchtime, at about 12.00. They choose the vegetables for lunch and help prepare the food and daily snacks, such as flapjacks, they also enjoy baking bread on Wednesdays. At lunchtime they wash and dry their hands, collect their own napkin and appropriately-sized cutlery and utensils, pour their own drinks using child-sized glasses and jug on a tray and then serve themselves and each other food from a sharing plate. Once finished in their own time, they are able to clear and wash up independently, supported only as necessary. On each of the accreditation visits the children were fully aware of their roles within the daily routine, happily sharing and helping each other. The owner is a very effective role model. She routinely uses positive language and is considerate of the children's feelings, guiding them effectively towards positive behaviour and respect for self and others.

Personal hygiene routines are approached and promoted respectfully and the children can clean their own faces with an individual flannel whilst looking in a mirror and brush their teeth after lunch. When the children are taken on outings they may choose to walk or ride in a double buggy. On their return in the afternoons, they again help prepare their snack and choose activities independently until their parents arrive any time between 16.00 and 17.30.

Comments from parent questionnaires show that they are happily extending Montessori practices at home, such as providing a small-sized table and chair at mealtimes, using a glass instead of a beaker and a low bed instead of a cot.

Montessori Practice: links with parents, including reports and records

The owner has built up very effective relationships with her parent group, based on respect and open communication. She makes time for verbal feedback each day during either drop off or collection. Daily information on each child's well-being, care routines and significant events is shared very effectively between setting and home via a Daily Diary which travels with the child, and secure use is made of some electronic media to liaise with families.

Parents fill out an 'All About Me' form on their child when beginning at The Little Children's House and then complete this again on a regular basis to update the owner about changes in their child's interests or development at home. This information is used by the owner to plan appropriate activities. She, in turn, produces an induction report for each new child after two weeks and these records, together with examples of the child's art work and photos and observations, are kept together in each child's individual Learning Journey. The owner liaises with parents to complete the mandatory two year

old progress review and prepares a transition document for any child moving on to a different setting. She sends out questionnaires inviting feedback and has recently begun a system of parent consultations which are documented. These serve to identify children's areas of development and how next steps might be supported within the setting and at home. The goals are relevant and the support suggested is practical and helpful.

Regular newsletters provide practical information for parents and include weekly menus, with ingredients listed, topics and news such as new children joining or village events.

Annual family events include a party in August to celebrate the birthday of The Little Children's House. Parents are invited into the setting for their child's birthday celebration and for regular gatherings such as at Christmas, Easter and Diwali, and mothers and grandmothers come in to celebrate Mother's Day. A selection of Montessori and parenting books is available for parents to borrow. The owner has run a Montessori based course 'The Conscious Parent in Action' for families in attendance, which offers practical-based parenting solutions to commonly experienced issues. This was well received and another is planned. Partnership with parents is excellent.

Staff: qualifications, deployment, and performance management

As a sole practitioner, the owner is responsible for all the practices and policies within her setting. The environment is checked each morning before the children arrive and at the end of each day. A comprehensive list of policies is maintained and reviewed regularly. These have been carefully prepared with guidance from the local childminding network to reflect actual practice and are clear and succinct. The owner ensures that all parents have read and signed the relevant policies. She reviews the setting's self-evaluation document annually with support from the local network and recognises the importance of sustained continuing professional development. She attends MSA region meetings, engages with the MSA national childminder network and the MSA National Council. She also attends local authority early years provider meetings and training events. She currently supports a student teacher and welcomes Montessori students, appreciating their contribution to the setting.

With changes made to record-keeping following the first accreditation visit, the owner appreciates the benefits of regular self-evaluation to reflect positively on her Montessori daily practice. She writes articles on childminding from a Montessori perspective for *Montessori International* and other publications. She is wholeheartedly dedicated to providing the Montessori approach within her childminding setting and works responsibly to maintain a high quality experience for all the children in her care, spending time and energy to ensure she remains updated within the Montessori and early years networks. It is clear that she works assiduously to support parents and provides them with clear and practical strategies so that she and they can work effectively as a team for the benefit of the child.

Name of Assessor: Sue Briggs

Date report submitted: First visit – 12 February 2017

Second visit – 27 April 2017