



# **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" (2012/14). 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.

### **The Montessori Children's House**

St. Nicholas Community Hall, 34 Robin Hood Lane, Sutton, Surrey SM1 2RG

Date of previous MEAB accreditation: June 2012

Date of first re-accreditation visit: 9 May 2016  
Date of second re-accreditation visit: 1 March 2017

This accreditation is valid until 31 July 2018

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

#### **Description of the nursery:**

The Montessori Children's House was established in 2003. It is privately owned and the owner has appointed a manager to run the setting. It follows the Montessori curriculum and incorporates the areas of learning and development set out in the Early Years Foundation Stage Framework (EYFS).

The nursery is situated in an urban area in Sutton and operates from a spacious hall with one large classroom. It has sole use of the premises during its opening hours and packs its resources away when others need access to the building. There is a kitchen, an office and a small enclosed garden which is accessible from the classroom; this has decking and a paved area. The lavatories are reached via a flight of stairs, and staff members accompany the children to them.

The nursery is open Monday to Friday in term times, from 08.30 to 15.30, 39 weeks of the year. All the children attend a minimum of three sessions per week, mornings,



afternoons or full days. There are currently 36 children aged between 2 and 4½ years on the roll. On the day of the second re-accreditation visit 19 attended in the morning and 17 stayed on for the afternoon, with four attending just for the afternoon, arriving for lunch at 12.00. Lunch starts at 12.00 and the children bring a packed meal from home.

There are seven members of staff working directly with the children, including the manager and her deputy, and all work part-time. The deputy is in charge when the manager is not in the nursery. Both have Montessori diplomas and a further member of staff is working towards a Montessori qualification. One of the team is a qualified nurse. Six staff members attended in the morning of the visit, and five in the afternoon. The setting supports children with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), special dietary requirements and children who speak English as an additional language (EAL).

## Summary

The staff team at The Montessori Children's House is committed to providing children with good quality care and education following the Montessori philosophy. The children benefit from good opportunities to make progress in their learning and development. The team work well together and communicate very effectively throughout the day. Continued professional development is very evident and considered important as staff use information from external courses to improve their practice. They have met two of the recommendations from the previous MEAB accreditation by providing resources for the children to extend their creative ideas independently, and by updating their record-keeping procedures through the recent introduction of a digital system, which staff use very effectively for planning and assessment of children's learning. However, while they have made changes to the way they combine the use of the indoor and outside areas, staff have not yet found the confidence to successfully open both areas simultaneously throughout the daily work cycles.

Following the first re-accreditation visit the setting has successfully reassessed the needs of the younger children and now provides a broad and interesting curriculum for them to enjoy. The materials now on offer encourage creativity, exploration and construction and are appropriate for the entire age range. While there is now less emphasis on the all children having to attend the group at the end of the work cycles, this practice is still promoted.

All members of staff form excellent partnerships with the parents. Parents are extremely well informed and appreciate the time the teachers give to them. The staff members support the children's personal, social and emotional skills by being excellent role-models. The children learn to respect and value others and take turns, and are well prepared socially for the next stage of learning. The staff members are committed to Montessori ideals and are supported by the parents in this approach.



***The school provides an education which broadly follows the principles of the Montessori approach and environment, however it has not met fully the recommendation(s) set out in the previous accreditation visit(s). This merits accreditation by the Montessori Evaluation and Accreditation Board for one year and the setting must address the following points:***

- open the garden for a longer period during the work cycles;
- review the arrangements for whole group teaching and for extra activities, including the use of the teachers' timetable, in order to ensure that the children have freedom of choice throughout the work cycles;
- promote the children's need for continuity and order in the prepared environment – they should be encouraged to complete their cycles of activity and staff should move furniture around as little as possible during the session; and
- ensure that the whole staff team undertake Montessori training to gain better understanding of Montessori principles and how to implement them.

### **Philosophy:**

Adherence to the Montessori philosophy is the foundation of the provision for children's learning at The Montessori Children's House. This is evident in some of the nursery's practice and also in its mission statement, publicity, prospectus and termly newsletter, as well as on the website. The children have many opportunities to be independent and to follow the established routines of the nursery while working at their own pace, without interruption. The children were able to self-select their own activities for the majority of the work cycle of the first re-accreditation visit, although this was less evident on the second visit due to group activities which interrupting the flow of the work cycle. Nevertheless, there was evidence of child-initiated learning at both visits. The children are very confident, polite and friendly; they enjoy interacting with each other and with visitors.

The staff team sensitively support children in their exploration of the environment. They use their time with the children to introduce new activities that follow the child's interests, and they have an understanding of Montessori practice. Although the children's love of learning is nurtured, some struggle to complete their cycles of activity and to follow the ground rules as the staff adhere to a timetable rather than continually following the children's individual needs and interests. This does not fully support Montessori practice.

The team review their principles and goals on a formal basis termly, and at weekly



meetings. Under the new manager the team have started to reflect on their practice and make changes when appropriate and the meeting minutes are shared with the staff who are not present. All are aware of procedures and staff responsibilities as these are clearly defined, documented in a file used in the classroom and clearly laid out in the information parents receive.

### **Learning and Development:**

The management and staff discuss and review the long term planning every term; this covers all areas of the curriculum and includes topics and festivals. They also have weekly short-term planning meetings and informal discussions at the end of each day, which are recorded if necessary. At the time of the first re-accreditation visit the children were learning collectively about flowers and growing plants, they had planted seedlings in tubs and grow-bags in the garden. Another of the topics had emerged because a child brought some money into nursery, which had sparked a general interest in currency amongst the children – activities were devised to include different currencies and a 'flower shop' with a till was set up outside. On the day of the second visit the children were learning about the different jobs that people do.

Planning for the individual child is comprehensive and, while it includes parents' contributions, it is predominately compiled by the key person using staff members' observations of the child. The short term planning reflects the child's developmental needs and interests very effectively. The nursery uses a comprehensive and secure digital record-keeping system, which allows for children's individual learning and development to be documented and next steps identified. Through their use of this system, staff members are able to link the Montessori curriculum with the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) areas of learning very effectively in the records and in their planning.

Importance is given to child-initiated learning, with adult-led activities also being planned. The timetable of group activities plays a prominent role in the curriculum offered; however, staff members do give the children time to repeat activities and to explore materials in a creative way during the work cycles. The nursery provides an indoor learning environment which is varied and offers an excellent range of appropriate Montessori materials integrated with a wide array of other resources suited to the needs of the children, including the younger ones, and these include role play activities. The children now have access to wide range of provision in all areas of learning across the mixed age range. The outside area also caters well for the needs of all the children. Organising the children's free-flow access to this area, as noted at the last accreditation, still requires further consideration. While the children used the outside area during the work cycles of both visits, the routines for free-flow need embedding fully into daily practice. The two areas when used concurrently provide the children with a very rich learning environment.

The nursery establishes excellent partnerships with parents and external agencies to



secure appropriate interventions for children with additional needs. Staff members speak a wide range of languages and they capably help the children who have English as a second language. Re-introducing a visual timetable for the children, with more pictorial images, would support them further.

The manager has recently introduced a system of checking staff observations of children which are recorded on the digital system. This helps ensure that all the key persons are up to date with their record-keeping and offers the opportunity for the manager to evaluate the provision for children's learning and development, which is currently good.

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

In keeping with the Montessori ethos, the large, light hall is carefully prepared; the equipment is systematically laid out and is clean and complete. The materials are well spaced on the shelves and are easily accessible to all the children. The layout of the room, the child-sized furniture and the curriculum available both indoors and out reflect the staff team's awareness of the children's spontaneous learning in a Montessori environment.

Following the first re-accreditation visit the changes made to the range of resources have been evident, especially for the younger children. More space has been provided for activities that suit the younger age group. Materials are creatively displayed and are inviting to the children. On the day of the second visit 'posting' was a popular activity – the staff had provided a 'post box' and letters for the children to post.

Flowers decorate the tables and the nature table also has plants as well as books about nature and puzzles. The book corner is an inviting area, with cushions on the floor and a well-resourced bookshelf and dolls house. On the day of the second visit two children were creating different scenarios for their 'grandma' and 'mother' dolls; this demonstrated the children's use of their imagination in representational play. This area is also used for sleeping should a child need to rest. On the days of both visits a child went to have a sleep there after lunch. A role-play area was set up as a 'laundry' on both days, which was popular. Art materials are available in one area of the classroom, which children are able to access independently. The topic during the first visit was flowers and growing and, on the second, jobs that people do. Following the first visit the Montessori activities for everyday living are now changed more frequently.

The small outside area is laid with paving stones and rubber safety mats, which enable the children to use it in all weathers. The extensive planting containers and fruit trees make the area aesthetically appealing and the children have made a 'bug hotel'. They care for the plants and are able to water them and enjoy watching them grow. There is also a kitchen role-play area and a play house, painting, a chalk board, a large wooden climbing frame, toy garage and trikes, as well as a popular sand pit. Children would benefit from having access to this excellent outside area throughout the majority of the work cycle, as this will provide for their inherent need for large motor movement, and



support all areas of their learning and development.

The staff team prepares the learning environment each day and model respect for it for the children, but the classroom sometimes has resources left out. Children would benefit from being guided consistently to complete their cycles of activity, and their need for order and consistency would be further supported by staff retaining the arrangement of the physical environment by moving furniture around as little as possible during the sessions.

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

The ethos and organisation of the nursery supports independence. Children are familiar with the daily routines. The older ones manage their own personal hygiene well, under appropriate supervision from staff, and all the children are encouraged to manage their own clothing themselves where possible.

The adults trust the children's ability to select activities spontaneously and to engage with them appropriately during both daily work cycles. Following a recommendation made at the first re-accreditation visit, whole group time at the end of the morning is now much shorter. However, there is still an expectation for all the older children to join this group, whilst some of the younger children are able to carry on with their own activities if they prefer. The staff team could consider giving all the children this choice as to whether they join in the circle, carry on working, or help prepare the lunch tables or environment at the end of the sessions. This would support a smoother transition to lunch or home time, as currently the children do not fully engage with the staff during circle times.

The children share their resources very well; they are considerate and co-operate with the staff and each other. They form good friendships and develop excellent social skills as they can often freely choose how and where they want to work, alone or within a small group, when they are in the classroom.

The team work very well with parents to support children's independence. The recently introduced digital web-based recording system allows parents to keep up to date with the activities their children are enjoying in nursery and they can see for themselves how independent their children are becoming. Staff members also offer the parents 'stay and play' days, which give them the opportunity to spend a session working alongside their child in nursery.

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

The nursery operates two similar sessions daily. The morning work cycle is 2¾ hours long on three mornings but is interrupted by additional activities on two mornings of the



week. The nursery offers ballet, music and French as additional activities. Ballet was scheduled on the day of the second re-accreditation visit and the work cycle therefore was only 1¾ hours in the morning for most of the children, as the room was cleared for the activity just after 10.30. Although the nursery opens at 08.30 the majority of the children do not arrive until around 09.00. It is recommended that these morning activities such as ballet take place later in the session to ensure that all the children can have a longer uninterrupted morning work cycle on all the days they attend. The afternoon cycle is about 2½ hours depending on how long lunch takes.

The staff team is still exploring the concept of using the outside area simultaneously with the indoor space and has made some progress, but offering continuous and free-flow access throughout the work cycles remains an area for development. It is recommended that staff continue to develop a workable system to allow some children to have supervised access to the outside during the majority of the session. This would enable children to pursue their needs and interests more fully, without disturbing the children working in the classroom.

Staff members have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities. They manage daily routines such as the toileting well, move around the setting as they are needed, indoors or out, and work with any of the children in this mixed age range. Presentations of the materials are given as required by any member of the team, not just the child's key person, but for most of the time the children work independently, which allows them to follow their natural rhythm of activity until circle time or timetabled activities.

Currently snack is available to the children after 10.00. They are involved in the preparation of their snack and, although they do not wash up after, they do have this opportunity at lunchtime. A few children bring their own snack from home. Staff members prepare the tables for lunch in the middle of the morning session. The furniture should remain static where possible for the whole work cycle to avoid interruption. The children who stay all day, and those who come in just for the afternoon session, bring their lunches from home. They help themselves to plates and cutlery. Following the recommendation from the first visit, the lunch routine has been re-organised and is now more harmonious. Staff members sit with the children and promote the Montessori ethos of grace and courtesy. These changes have given the children an opportunity for improved social interaction with their peers and adults at meal times.

As all the staff work part-time, care is taken to match the key person's days with the child's attendance and, while there is an informal system of cover when the child's own key person is not available, this system is currently under review so that a deputy key person will be appointed to support full continuity of care for each child.



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

When a child starts at the nursery the parents complete a form 'getting to know you'. This, together with information learnt through verbal interaction, enables the staff to form a baseline for their own observations of the new child. The mandatory two year old progress check is also drawn up with parental contributions, using the digital system.

It is the responsibility of the key person to keep their key children's records up to date but all the staff members contribute to these online, using iPads to make written observations and to take photographs of the child. The staff team manages use of the secure digital system effectively. Parents are aware of these recording and assessment processes and are also adapting to the new digital records. They enjoy looking at their child's online Profile record, they can contribute to plans for their child's learning and development and they appreciate the work the teachers are doing with their children. This system is also used to generate an end of term report and a transition document for the child's next school, with links to the EYFS areas of learning.

Parents are also kept very well informed of their child's progress through regular verbal feedback, monthly print-outs of the child's online Profile and at termly parent meetings. They speak highly of the nursery and are very complimentary about what it offers their children. They value the time given by the teachers to talk to them on a daily basis if required. The nursery also encourages parents to join in with festival celebrations and 'stay and play' sessions. These give them the opportunity to see the Montessori method of education for themselves and they can learn more through Montessori magazines and a DVD. Links with parents are excellent.

### **Staffing:**

The nursery's owner agrees the budget for purchasing major items of equipment but the recently-appointed manager runs the setting on a day-to-day basis. She is a responsive and able Montessori practitioner who is reviewing practice across the setting. Her leadership of the setting will be enhanced by all staff members undertaking CPD Montessori training to gain deeper understanding of Montessori philosophy and its implementation in daily life of the nursery.

Bespoke job descriptions are now in place for all staff and all the team's members are either training for suitable childcare qualifications or have them already. Professional development is an integral part of the nursery's philosophy and team members attend Montessori conferences as well as local authority training. One member of staff recently attended a speech and language course and has successfully simplified the use of language when speaking with children, especially those who are at an early stage of understanding English.

The induction process for new staff is thorough and new members feel well supported



by the manager and her team. The peer on peer observations, reinstated following the first reaccreditation visit, now help to support the supervision of staff and assessment of their practice and these should continue to be seen as a valued tool for performance management. Also following the first visit, lead roles and responsibilities (such as for monitoring SEND) have been shared out amongst the team effectively. Photographs of each staff member and their roles are now displayed prominently in the hall so the parents know who to approach.

The setting's decision to apply for reaccreditation is testament to their commitment to the Montessori method of education and to evaluating their practice so that they can continue to offer good quality early education.

Name of Assessor: Charlotte White

Date report submitted: First visit – 11<sup>th</sup> May 2016

Second visit – 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2017