



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" (2008). The second visit sought to assess the progress made on the recommendations set out in the report from the first 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.

Montessori Children's House

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

Date of the first accreditation visit: 17 November 2011

Date of the second accreditation visit: 26 April 2012

This accreditation report relates to the provision for children aged two to five years.

Description of the school:

The Montessori Children's House is located in a community hall just off Sutton High Street. The school has use of one large hall, with access to a small, enclosed outside area. Although a shared-use building, the school benefits from having sole use of the kitchen and toilets during the hours of its operation.

The school is open term time from 08:45 to 15:15, 39 weeks per year. It is registered to take 30 children aged between two and five years at any one time. It currently has 42 children on roll. The school offers morning, afternoon and full day sessions and is able to support children with special educational needs and those for whom English is an additional language.

The setting is led by the owner, who holds the Montessori Early Childhood Diploma. She is supported by a head teacher who holds the Montessori qualification as well as a degree and Early Years Professional Status (EYPS). An additional five members of staff make up the full team; three of these are Montessori qualified whilst the other two are currently completing their NVQ Level III in childcare training.

Summary and conclusion

The Montessori Children's House provides a calm and inviting atmosphere for the children. The small team work effectively together in offering a clean, motivating, accessible environment that nurtures the children as confident and independent learners. The children are consistently busy and engaged in activities that enable them to achieve in all areas of development. Collaboratively, staff prepare for an uninterrupted work cycle of two and a half hours in support of their goal of promoting the children's independence and self-choice.



Incorporating greater access to the outside area during the whole of the session would ensure seamless and continuous provision. Since the first accreditation visit recent improvements to the layout of the environments both inside and outside now provide the children with more space for movement and choice. Continuous and on-going thoughtful, critical evaluation of the two environments will ensure that the highly effective practice inside the classroom will become a natural element of the outside. Fusing the planning for inside and outside environments would ensure continuity across the school.

The team is consistent in their approach and vision of the school. This is displayed in practice through the clear role modeling and guidance that they provide to the children. A high adult to child ratio is again evidence of the commitment and effective leadership of the school. Procedures in place lay the foundation for reflective practice, observation, assessment and recording. A review of the current paperwork has taken place since the first visit. Although this is still under review and remains a work-in-progress, steps have been made to enable the key-person to support children's learning and development holistically. This underpins the goal of providing a more effective and clearer link between the various strands of information that will eventually become embedded in practice.

The school provides an education which follows the principles of the Montessori approach and environment. The school has successfully achieved 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 reflect upon and implement a more seamless transition to the outside area throughout the whole of the work cycle.
- To look at extending the children's creative ideas through independent access to more resources that provide for experimentation, art and creative play.
- Continue to review and reflect upon current assessment and recording processes to ensure effective linking of information between observations, learning journeys, next steps and planning.

Philosophy:

The school's mission statement summarises its aim to provide a calm, safe, secure and nurturing environment. In practice this is evident through the clear ground rules and consistent role modeling of the adults and the team's consistency in their approach to their vision of the Montessori philosophy.

Children manage themselves in the classroom independently. They are consistently supported in their ability to move around the school and make choices for learning, thus leading to the development of self-discipline and self-initiated learning.

The team is able to informally communicate on a daily basis to ensure that they are following and meeting individual children's needs. In practice, this promotes a calm, busy atmosphere where children display good levels of involvement and self-discipline. The adults trust the children's ability to self-direct and ensure that they have the space and time to choose, discover, explore and complete activities.

Parents are provided with guidance on the Montessori approach through the school prospectus



and are given monthly updates on their child's learning journey. Since the first visit this has been further supported by the launch of the school's carefully laid out website.

Learning and Development:

The school offers a range of core learning opportunities, which are enriched with small group activities such as music and French throughout the week.

The core Montessori activities are available and the classroom is organized into areas of learning. Small group activities such as baking, although planned, do not disturb the class and form part of the child's choice.

The enclosed outside area is well used and provides children with additional activities such as climbing. Elements of a continuous provision across both indoor and outdoor environments are evident, for example in the different activities linked to the project of 'measuring'. This effective element of the planning should be enhanced so that opportunities outside are more readily linked to the experiences that the children enjoy inside (enabling them to make connections and scaffold their learning through continuity). Since the first visit clear progress has been made in the planning, preparation and maintenance of the outside. Activities supporting skills for everyday living are in place and accessible in the garden area. In working further towards a highly effective continuous provision the team are encouraged to consider the transition of ground rules and the child's cycle of activity inside and outside.

Following a process of thoughtful evaluation, the team has introduced an 'open' and 'closed' sign for the outside door with the aim of extending the children's level of independence and choice. The team should continue to evaluate this new strategy, observing and evidencing any change in the children's social dispositions, and consider extending the time that children can choose to go outside to the majority of the work-cycle.

For most of the children their uninterrupted work-cycle is for two and a half hours, both in the morning and afternoon.

A snack of fresh fruit and milk or water is freely available throughout both sessions. The children help themselves, although a teacher is on hand to support any preparation and handling of fruit. Children who stay all day or attend the afternoon session bring a packed lunch. The children eat together with the staff and enjoy a sociable meal time.

Planning is carried out on a long, medium and short term basis. The current system is made up of several files which, when looked at together, provide all relevant information. As a result of the first visit the team are clear that the system they have in place works for them in providing information that they can clearly see. However, as part of their new, on-going reflective practice this aspect is discussed and reviewed regularly at team meetings.

The key person files hold information regarding observations and the next steps for each child, (which are linked to the Montessori activities). Following the first visit the team has been actively looking at ways to review this system and now produce observations that are collated more clearly in a diary format. When embedded this recent change in practice will provide clear evidence for the key-person's assessment of the child's next steps and the overall short-term planning of the classroom. Collaboratively the staff should now look at ways of ensuring that there is a rationale for the child's chosen next steps that links to their understanding of the



evaluation of the on-going observations.

Prepared Environment: resources and materials

The large, spacious classroom is prepared and maintained on a daily basis; it is laid out according to the curriculum areas. A book corner at one end of the classroom provides a quiet space, enclosed and away from the rest of the class. A nature table is displayed and children add to this daily. Children have access to a variety of activities linked to block play. These are freely available, though they are displayed under a shelf and may be difficult to access or to really see what the true choice is. An easel and a junk modeling table are available to enable the children to extend their ideas and arts and crafts skills.

A sufficient amount of materials is displayed; however, some activities appeared difficult to access at the time of the first visit. During the second visit it was obvious that the team had reviewed the organisation of the classroom and of the opportunities for movement and choice. Children now have access to a large floor space and this area was constantly in use during the second visit. The mats have been repositioned and as a result many children, individually and independently, chose to use this space to play with a variety of activities that are now more accessible. Children were consistently busy during the second visit and displayed a high level of concentration and independence as a result of this review. The team are now encouraged to observe and consider the child's creative mind, expression and ability to transform ideas through extended block play, experiments and art.

Materials are clean, complete and effective for the age group and the children clearly enjoy their time at the Children's House.

Montessori practice: independence

Children at the school are confident in their independence. They are able to access their own materials, prepare their own snacks, put their coats on and off and make their own choices.

Parents indicate that the photos in the learning journeys provide them with clear ideas for promoting independence, freedom and support at home.

Individual activities, supported by effective adult guidance during group sessions, promote the children's respect for others and themselves. Children clean up after themselves, accessing dustpans, brooms, mops and cloths to clean, dust and wash.

Adults respect the child's choice and this role modeling is obvious in the way the children also display respect for each other by not disturbing, yet helping when support is needed. However, this real choice could be further enhanced through continuous and spontaneous free-flow to the outside area. With the current implementation of the 'open' and 'closed' door signs, choice for the children has now started to become embedded in daily practice.

Montessori practice: classroom management

Clear ground rules, consistent role modeling and positive adult interaction provide the foundation for the effective practice that takes place inside the classroom. The team should



now ensure that this practice is clearly transferred to the outside area.

Adults support children's learning and development at all times. They are highly effective with their time and manage to sit back and observe, yet engage with the children at the appropriate moments. Their positive interaction and communication with the children extends the children's thinking and questioning, such as during a successful baking activity which provided children with clear instructions and questioning, supported with a pictorial timeline.

A key person system is in place and next steps and planning in the classroom, are done on a daily basis and follow individual children's needs.

Montessori Practice: links with parents, including reports and records

Staff are effectively deployed and even the newest members are clearly aware of their roles and responsibilities. They maintain the environment well and share tasks such as door duties.

Clear links with parents are in place. A welcome pack and the children's ongoing learning journey records are valuable tools for parent/school links. The learning journeys present photographic evidence and a monthly written assessment of the child's progress based on the EYFS areas of learning and development. Evidence for the monthly assessment is taken from observations gathered and kept on the key person's file. A final report is prepared for children leaving the setting.

Parents know who their child's key person is and they are aware of the goals of the EYFS. Newsletters, feedback forms and parent meetings all support effective communication between home and the Children's House. Parents are happy with the links with the school and are encouraged by their children's progress.

A website provides parents with up to date information, including the current newsletter.

Staffing:

Highly effectively leadership lays the foundation for the successful team structure. Members of staff are clear about their roles and responsibilities within the school. A well-structured induction process and supportive team enables new staff members to fit in and mirror the effective practice already in place. Open channels of communication amongst the team enables information to flow and the excellent role modelling of good practice by senior staff further supports the work of this dedicated and passionate team. Teamwork is highly effective on a day to day basis and clearly evident in practice.

Staff are highly qualified and ongoing training and in-house support is documented. Recent training has been linked to the welfare and safeguarding of the children.

All members of staff have participated in annual appraisals. This process could be further enhanced by linking individual development with the planning and ongoing self-appraisal of the school as a whole.

Since the first accreditation visit, the head teacher has gone on maternity leave. This has not compromised the effective leadership and communication amongst the team or the thriving



practice in place. All members have a voice and as a team now ensure that they meet once a week to specifically reflect upon and evaluate the points raised from the accreditation process.

There is a shared vision amongst the team and a clear understanding of Montessori principles and practice.

Name of Assessor: Dawn Nasser

Date of reports:

First visit - 23 November 2011

Second visit - 28 April 2012