



# **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) and subsequent 2012 revisions. 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.

### **Star Child Montessori Day Nursery**

Wiltshire Road Hall, Wiltshire Road, Thornton Heath, Surrey CR7 7QN

Date of first re-accreditation visit: 31 January 2014

Date of second re-accreditation visit: 2 May 2014

Date of previous MEAB accreditation: March 2010

This accreditation report relates to the provision for children aged 3 months to 5 years.

#### **Description of the school**

Star Child Montessori is a privately owned nursery that was registered in 2004. It is housed in a refurbished church hall, situated in a densely populated residential area of Thornton Heath in the London Borough of Croydon. The nursery consists of two adjacent buildings containing five spacious rooms for children aged 3 months to 5 years old, each room having the name of a planet in the Solar System. Children are grouped by age: 3 months to 2 years, 2 to 3 years and 3 to 5 years.

The children aged 3 months to 2 years and 2 to 3 years share a single storey building consisting of a room for each age range and a laundry room. On the ground floor of the main building are the two pre-school rooms, kitchen and office. On the first floor there is a room where the toddlers take their rest period, a staff room, library and a large hall.

The two pre-school rooms open onto a combined outdoor area. This is partially covered by a substantial canopy, so is available in all weathers. The rooms for children aged 3 months to 3 years also open onto their own outdoor area, with equipment to develop gross motor skills and sensory exploration. Each room has its own cloakroom and toilet facilities.

The nursery is open from 7.30 to 18.30 for 51 weeks of the year. There are currently 107



children on roll. Both sessional and full time places are available. Those that attend half day sessions in the three to five age range have one classroom, whilst the other room is for children who stay all day. On the day of the second re-accreditation visit there were 20 full time pre-school children and 28 sessional; 15 for the morning session and 13 for the afternoon session. Thirteen children under 2 years attended all day, with an additional three joining them in the afternoon.

There are 25 members of staff. Of these, 23 hold appropriate early years' qualifications, with eight holding Montessori diplomas and three holding Foundation Degrees in Early Years; the owner/manager has both of these qualifications and is in regular attendance, supported by a deputy. Two staff are also qualified to degree level, with one also having Qualified Teacher Status (QTS). On the day of the second re-accreditation visit 15 staff were present, along with a further four auxiliary members of staff. With its own kitchen and full time cook, all dietary needs can be catered for. There is full support for children with additional needs and those who are learning English as an additional language.

## Summary

Star Child Montessori has the love of the child at the centre of every aspect of its practice. The classrooms are bright and inviting, and the children are offered a variety of learning opportunities both inside and outside. The wall and ceiling displays in some of the rooms are over-stimulating and it is recommended that these are reviewed. Well trained and qualified staff respect the needs of individual children and promote the joy of the process of learning rather than focusing on the end result. Children are encouraged to follow their own path, upholding the nursery's motto of 'laying the foundation for bright futures'.

During both the morning and afternoon sessions the children over 2 years old are free to work wherever they choose, be that inside or out within their classroom area. This provision for free flow has improved significantly since the first MEAB accreditation.

Strong teamwork ensures that the needs of the children are met. The Montessori ethos is strong throughout the nursery; an area that has been recently developed is the increased awareness of Montessori principles and practice amongst the staff who work with the children under 2 years of age.

A recommendation from the previous accreditation was to ensure that planning was drawn up from the Montessori checklist with a knowledge of how the Montessori curriculum fits with the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) framework. Staff have worked hard to make the link clear and the management team have extended this development further to produce an information booklet for parents.

***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 review the displays to ensure they enhance learning and follow the interests of the child.
- Continue to work on matching the Montessori opportunities for learning both inside and outside.

### **Philosophy:**

At Star Child Montessori Nursery each child is treated as an individual and is encouraged to work at his or her own pace. Activities are planned according to the child's interests and developmental stage. The love of the child is central to the ethos of the school and is inherent in every member of staff's practice, as they guide the children through stimulating and challenging activities both inside and outdoors.

The children are evidently happy and secure, showing developing respect and consideration to each other and to the adults around them. The rooms are organised in such a way that, from a very early age, children can develop independence in their learning. Since the first re-accreditation visit the Montessori practice for the under 2s has been reviewed. Montessori principles are now clearly in evidence in all areas of the provision.

Montessori philosophy is extremely well defined in the nursery's prospectus and on its website. This is reviewed regularly, particularly when changes are necessary due to government initiatives or nursery restructuring. Parents are aware of the Montessori approach to learning and comment on the development they observe in their children.

### **Learning and Development:**

The children are divided into age groups across the setting. Pluto (for children aged 3 months to 2 years) has separate nappy changing, sleeping and feeding areas within the main room, and is furnished with low level shelving units, tables and chairs. Children have access to sand and water play, construction, sensorial activities as well as a soft ball pit and a 'black and white' corner. They also have access to a secure outside area throughout the day.

The Venus room (for 2 to 3 year olds) has low level shelving units offering introductory exercises to everyday living, such as pouring, transferring and threading, early sensorial, numeracy and literacy activities, alongside construction and small world play. The cycle of activity is introduced at this stage, as are lessons in grace and courtesy. Cloakroom facilities are within the class's area and it has its own access to the self-contained outside area, allowing for free flow throughout the day.

Neptune and Jupiter (for the 3 to 5 year olds) offer the full range of Montessori and supplementary materials. Art, craft and role play are available throughout the day here.

Star Child Montessori Nursery has two work cycles each day. The morning work cycle is from 9.15 to 11.45 and the afternoon from 13.00 to 15.30 for those children who do not need to sleep. During the two work cycles there is opportunity for children to work individually and in small groups. Children are free to work wherever they choose within their class and staff



follow, rather than direct, children's learning. Since the first MEAB accreditation the nursery has introduced the principle of the work cycle in the afternoons as well as the mornings in all rooms and staff move freely throughout the environment, meeting the needs of all the children in their area.

The nursery has good links with the local authority special needs support agencies. The key person of a child with additional needs will incorporate any recommendations into the child's planning and next steps records, so that all staff can be made aware of and be able to support every child's needs.

The setting plans as a whole for main topics such as Chinese New Year. From this, each room plans separately, according to the developmental stages of the children. Individual children are planned for by their key person using a Montessori checklist which, since the first re-accreditation visit, has been linked to the EYFS learning goals. It is now easy to track the planning for each child, as the EYFS and Montessori curriculum are documented together.

Staff pass on observations they have made of any child to the child's key person during the rest period between the morning and afternoon work cycles. Room leaders check every child's planning records each half term and feed back to key persons.

Regular staff meetings, training days, supervision and peer observations all support staff in developing their practice and effectiveness within the learning environment.

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

Star Child Montessori Nursery offers stimulating, clean and well organised rooms for the children, with furniture and resources appropriate to their developmental stage and ages. The rooms are planned to allow maximum freedom of movement and generally feel bright and spacious.

In some of the rooms the wall displays and decorations hanging from the ceilings are over-stimulating and distracting. On the first re-accreditation visit it was recommended that staff should view each room from the children's eye level and perspective, questioning who the displays are for and what purpose they serve. Some of the display boards have been lowered to child height and some of the ceiling displays have been removed. Most of the displays are inspired by the interests of the children, but some continue to be overcrowded. It is recommended that staff continue to review the displays to ensure they enhance learning opportunities and follow the interests of the child at all times.

The Montessori materials appear well used and complete in range. Since the first re-accreditation visit a system of weekly review of the resources in each room has been put in place. A resources sheet is completed, on which staff record consumable resources they require for topics the following week and materials they have removed from the shelves as incomplete. Each room has areas for art, craft and role play available all day, with activities prepared in conjunction with the planned topics. The resources are regularly replenished throughout the day, ensuring all children can freely participate when they choose to. Staff review the materials on offer, adding and removing exercises to meet the current needs of the children.

The outside classrooms have been developed considerably since the last MEAB accreditation.



There are two outside areas; one is a small, self contained area for the 3 months to 3 year olds, with locomotive toys, a sensory area, sand and water play. The two pre-school rooms share the other outdoor area; it has cushioned artificial flooring around a large climbing frame, a canopied area housing boxes containing activities for a variety of learning opportunities and a garden area dominated by a large tree, which is creatively used to enhance learning. Work continues to match the Montessori opportunities for learning both inside and outside.

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

The setting places strong emphasis on supporting emerging independence from a very early age. All children are encouraged to take off and put on their own coats and shoes if they can and parents are advised as how best to assist them in doing this at home, for example having shoes with Velcro rather than laces. Children in the pre-school rooms self-register on arrival. All children are encouraged to pour their own drinks and prepare their snack. They serve each other at lunchtime and help to tidy the classrooms. There are plenty of resources available to assist in these tasks such as child-sized brooms and mops. The rooms are organised so that the children are supported to independently access the toilets, wash their hands, blow their noses and put on or remove their coats when they are able.

Children over the age of 2 years have free access to all areas of their class throughout both work cycles. Since the previous MEAB accreditation these children also now have unlimited access to the outside classroom. The number of children outside is regulated by each child putting on one of a limited number of high visibility vests as they go outside and so correct adult to child ratios can be maintained. Those up to 2 years old are taken out in six-seater buggies at least twice a day, they have access to the outside space and plenty of opportunity during the day to develop their gross motor skills in the indoor environment.

The cycle of activity is introduced to children from age 2 years upwards. Children are encouraged to return their activities to the shelves and both staff and older children role model this throughout the day.

Children and staff show very high levels of respect towards each other and staff plan many activities to support children's emerging social and self-care skills. During the first visit, children were seen to wait patiently for another child to complete their activity and return it to the shelf before they had their turn. If a member of staff is working with a particular child and others become interested in the activity, they are encouraged to watch without interrupting until the child has finished. The children are never rushed to complete individual activities or forced to join in groups. The opportunities are offered and children are free to choose where, in what, how often and for how long they wish to participate.

The daily routine is clear and displayed as a visual timetable in all the rooms. Children appear to be very secure with the routines and they seem able to pre-empt what is going to happen next purely by the rhythm of the day; for example, during the first visit several children who were working outside in the morning remarked to a member of staff that they needed to go in as they were ready for the snack cafe to open, they did this without being told it was time.

Star Child has a well established transition process for parents, and they are given a checklist to help them prepare their child to start at the nursery.



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

The nursery has two work cycles each day, the morning work cycle begins for the older children with self-registration and a short circle time of approximately fifteen minutes, after which children settle quickly to choosing activities from the shelves.

Children are grouped by age; however, if a 2½ year old is ready to be in the 3 to 5 year olds room they will be introduced to it for certain periods of the day. Before the session starts and during lunch/sleep time, children up to age 3 are all together and therefore the nursery has periods of the day where the Montessori mixed age grouping is evident. Due to the layout of the building and the ratio requirements the nursery has found that the way they have grouped the children best meets their needs.

The daily planned activities for all areas of each room are available for all children. It is their choice as to whether they participate in an activity or not. Additional activities such as French are offered in a similar way. The nursery offers a breakfast club from 7.30 to 9.00. Staff shift patterns ensure that the care of the children remains consistent. The transition from the breakfast club to the start of the session is smooth, with children self-registering and joining the circle activity when they are ready.

Each member of staff has designated areas of the classroom, both indoor and outdoor, that they plan for and maintain on a weekly rotational basis, this ensures all areas are well resourced and maintained at all times.

Each child is also individually planned for by their key person. These plans are made available to all staff in the classrooms, ensuring any member of staff can work with any child. Planning can be spontaneous, child-led or adult focused. Midday supervisors assist with lunch time and the resting period, allowing staff time to share observations with key persons. The babies have a sleeping area within their room, allowing them to settle into their own rhythm of activity and rest. The children from the toddler room take their rest time together after lunch in the large room upstairs. The care of these younger children by appropriately qualified and experienced staff caters for their individual needs.

Key persons communicate with parents at the beginning and end of every day. Parents are very pleased with the information they receive about their children and comment on the happy and calm atmosphere throughout the nursery.

Regular staff meetings and in-house training days enable room management to be reviewed regularly. Monthly supervision of the rooms by the management team and peer on peer observations also help support effective management and promote team work.

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

Every child's key person is responsible for their planning and record keeping along with parent liaison. Parents know their child's key person and are happy with the information they receive about their child's progress. Daily written reports for parents are prepared in the baby and toddler rooms.



Notice boards outside each room indicate the children's activities and the main topics. Weekly planning sheets, along with photos of the children, are displayed on the boards. Menus, newsletters and relevant forms are also easily accessible to parents and parents' evenings are organised.

Star Child's website has been updated since the first re-accreditation visit, so that essential policies and aspects of the prospectus are now available on it.

The nursery uses a specific checklist for the mandatory two year old check. This is used effectively with parents to plan for each child's specific needs and interests. In addition, every month parents receive a 'Learning Journey' update in the form of a mini report, with a photograph of their child participating in an activity or learning opportunity, along with notes on progress, next steps, and ideas of how families can support their child at home.

The nursery has successfully introduced a 'cultural' box which goes home with a different child each week. The child's family adds items that are of particular interest or significance to their culture, and when this box is returned to the nursery the following week the contents are shared with the rest of the group. This is a very practical way that the nursery caters for the diversity of family backgrounds and shares the rich variety of cultures present.

The nursery uses Croydon's 'Early Years Transfer Sheet' to pass information to the child's next school, along with their 'Learning Journey' file. If the child is moving out of the area or is placed on a waiting list, this information is passed to the parents, and it then becomes the family's responsibility to pass the information on to the child's next school.

Star Child Montessori has developed strong partnerships with parents, based on mutual respect and an understanding of the importance of consistency of care between home and nursery.

### **Staffing:**

Star Child Montessori Nursery has a well defined staffing structure. The recruitment and induction process is rigorous and continued professional development is encouraged. New staff are well supported by the owner/manager and deputy and are given a mentor. Appraisals take place once a year but are reviewed after six months with an interim appraisal conducted by the manager. Job descriptions are comprehensive and have been reviewed since the first re-accreditation visit, so that all job descriptions include reference to Montessori practice and a commitment to delivering a Montessori curriculum throughout the nursery.

The manager holds Montessori qualifications at Foundation and Early Elementary level and has recently completed an Early Years Foundation Degree. The deputy has an NVQ level 3 and an Early Years Foundation Degree. Five out of the seven staff in the two pre-school rooms hold Montessori diplomas, with two holding NVQ level 4 in Early Years; the two graduates are also Montessori qualified, one holds a BSc degree and one holds a BA Hons degree with QTS at primary level. Out of the nine staff working with the under 3s, six hold NVQ level 3 and three hold NVQ level 2. The room leader for the 2 to 3 year olds has attended a range of CPD workshops on Montessori practice and philosophy.

The nursery presently has two apprentices who are at NVQ level 3. The seven support staff



hold relevant qualifications for the duties they perform.

The nursery holds staff meetings every six weeks, at which policies are reviewed, recent training evaluated and shared and any additional training needs assessed. Supervision of the rooms and peer on peer observations occur every month. This promotes strong teamwork and enables the management team to regularly review how the rooms are operating and invite any suggestions that could help to improve practice.

An action point suggested at the first re-accreditation visit was for all staff to gain knowledge of Montessori philosophy to ensure continuity of the good practice throughout the nursery. Through a series of in-house CPD training days and staff question and answer sessions, all staff now have a much better knowledge of Montessori philosophy. They have worked extremely hard to ensure that throughout Star Child Nursery the Montessori ethos is evident. More experienced staff constantly and consistently role model good practice and they encourage less experienced staff. This has had a very positive effect on the children and on their behaviour towards others.

Name of Assessor: Denys Lyne

Date of reports: First visit – 02.02.14

Second visit – 02.05.14