



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.

Artisans Kindergarten

Crabtree Fields Scout HQ, Waldergrave Park, Harpenden, Hertfordshire AL5 5SF

Date of first accreditation visit: 27 April 2015

Date of second accreditation visit: 12 October 2015

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

Description of the nursery

Artisans Kindergarten is located in Harpenden. The nursery is privately owned and has been registered since 2007; it moved to the present site in 2009. It opens Mondays to Thursdays from 08.30 until 16.30 and Fridays from 08.30 until 12.30 during term time only. The setting has sole use of the scout headquarters' facilities during its operational hours and packs its equipment away daily. There is a good sized entrance hall, well equipped kitchen, a secure outdoor play area and a large hall that is used as the classroom. Children from the age of 2 to 5 years share all the facilities; there are currently 81 children on roll between those ages. Drop off and collection times are flexible and children attend for a variety of sessions.

On the day of the second visit 47 children attended the morning session, of whom 19 were under the age of 3 years. Seventeen stayed all day and 19 in all were present for the afternoon. Hot lunch is provided to those whose parents opt to take up this service, or children can bring a packed meal from home. The nursery supports children who speak English as an additional language and children with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Artisans Kindergarten employs 17 members of staff, including two chefs who work on a part-time basis. Twelve hold relevant qualifications in childcare, five with Montessori



diplomas, and four are currently undergoing Montessori training. The owner/manager works four days a week and the deputy takes charge in her absence. On the day of the second visit 13 staff were present in the morning and eight worked full-time.

Summary

Artisans Kindergarten provides care and education in line with Montessori principles and the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). The owner/manager has a clear vision for this establishment, which is shared effectively with the staff and parents. Links with parents are very strong: they are considered partners in their child's education; their views are sought, valued and acted upon.

The favourable learning environment, both indoors and outdoors, is well prepared with a good range of Montessori materials and other learning resources. These are displayed on low shelves to facilitate spontaneous learning and independence.

The appropriately qualified team work together for the benefit of all the children. They have given careful consideration to the recommendations made during the first accreditation visit. Additional Montessori learning materials have been purchased and some repaired. On-going monitoring of the resources will help ensure that they are of consistently high quality. In-house training on observation has had a positive effect on the learning and development of the children; observations are now more consistent and informative for assessing and planning purposes. In order to continue to support the team in this area it would be beneficial for this training to continue. It is recommended that presentations of Montessori materials are monitored to ensure high standards of practice and consistency among the team.

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 monitor the quality of the observations to ensure that strategies put in place since the first accreditation visit become embedded in daily practice;
- continue to monitor the quality of the Montessori learning resources; and
- put in place strategies to ensure that presentations of Montessori learning materials are of the same standard throughout the team.



Philosophy:

Artisans Kindergarten's philosophy is outlined in terms of Montessori practices and the EYFS. It is defined in writing and was reviewed with the whole team prior to applying for MEAB accreditation. It is widely publicised on the informative website, parents literature and during formal and informal meetings with parents. The holistic development of the child is at the core of this setting's ethos and the close partnerships forged with the parents, carers and other agencies are exemplary.

Furthermore, the favourable environment, both indoors and outdoors, provides the children with plenty of opportunities to follow their interests. The staff rota ensures that there are sufficient adults in all areas to support the children's learning. Staff demonstrate a good knowledge of Montessori principles and the children's developing independence is respected. The classroom code of conduct, which promotes respect for oneself, each other and the environment, is implemented sensitively. The adults act as positive role models for the children as they treat each other, the parents and children with respect. To support further the good practices already in place it is recommended that the strategies introduced to ensure that observations are evaluative (not just descriptive) continue to be monitored, that on-going attention is paid to the state of repair of the Montessori materials, and that presentations are of a consistently high standard.

Learning and Development:

Artisans Kindergarten promotes learning and development in accordance with the EYFS and the Montessori approach. The indoor and outdoor environments provide the children with a wealth of opportunities to develop in all areas of learning. The classroom is organised in accordance with Montessori principles and the learning resources are accessible to the children at all times. The three hour work cycles, both in the morning and afternoon, provide the children with plenty of time to direct their own learning and for the staff to engage with the children. During the visits open-ended questions were skillfully used by some members of the team in order to consolidate and build on children's learning. However, presentations of Montessori materials were of a variable standard. It is therefore recommended that strategies are developed to ensure consistency of these across the team.

Outdoor learning opportunities are excellent. The outdoor classroom is accessible to the children throughout the work cycles and visits to the local woodland are undertaken on a regular basis. The children relish these experiences and during the first visit some were heard enthusiastically sharing with staff their preferred activities, putting forward ideas on what could be further explored, prior to their woodland outing. The key person system, named 'key team' at this setting, is in place and works effectively – each child is assigned to two members of staff to ensure continuity of care and learning as some members of the team work on a part-time basis and some do not hold a Montessori qualification.



Records of progress are held digitally. There are good policies in place to ensure that confidentiality is maintained. The links between the Montessori curriculum and the EYFS areas of learning are automatically created using the web-based software. These links are based on observations entered into the system by the key persons. Observations are carried out on a regular basis. Some are directly linked to photographs.

The management team has put effective strategies in place to address the recommendation regarding observations made during the first visit and, as a result, the staff are now more aware of the need to evaluate the observations that they make in order to extract the learning that has taken place during the activity seen. Possible lines of development are also now identified and acted upon. To ensure that the strategies put in place become embedded in daily practice it is recommended that the management team continues to monitor this aspect of practice.

Prepared Environment: resources and materials

The team at Artisans Kindergarten prepares both the indoor and outdoor environments daily to provide the children with positive learning experiences. There is a good range of Montessori materials and other learning resources in the large classroom. To address the recommendation made during the first accreditation visit some additional Montessori materials were purchased and some were repaired. However, this needs further consideration as some materials continue to be in need of repair.

The indoor environment is divided by curriculum areas in accordance with Montessori principles. The learning materials are placed on low shelves, they are easily accessible to the children and sufficient for the number of children attending. An inviting role play corner provides the children with plenty of opportunities to develop their creativity and social and emotional skills. A large reading area contains a good selection of books. The classroom provides ample space for the children to work alone, in pairs and in small and large groups.

The outdoor classroom, which is much enjoyed by all the children and adults, also covers all the areas of learning. Gross motor skills are developed by children engaging in climbing, running, cycling, digging and playing with the large array of building resources. Knowledge and understanding of the world is explored in meaningful ways through planting, care of living things and respect for nature. Musical instruments, a large role play area and art activities encourage creativity. Mark-making is developed outdoors as well as indoors. The resources available cater for the children's ages and stages of development.

The adults understand their roles and responsibilities in relation to the preparation and upkeep of the prepared environment and the children are partners in this process. They are encouraged to return completed activities to the shelves, prepare the tables for snack and lunch, to clean their working space once a task is finished and to tidy up in



the garden before returning to the classroom at the end of a session.

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

Children's independence is fostered throughout the work cycles. During these extended periods they are free to select which environment they want to work and play in, indoors or out, whether to participate in planned activities, to select and remain with chosen tasks and to work alone, in pairs or small groups. They are encouraged and, if necessary, supported to put their own coats and shoes on, to help themselves to water and snack during the hour that snack is freely available, and to wash their hands independently. The children display high levels of independence and confidence.

The adults treat the children with respect by having regard for their preferences and cultural backgrounds, valuing their contribution to the setting's routines and by working in close partnership with their parents and other agencies in order to support their overall development. Independence at home is actively promoted during informal and formal meetings with the parents and also by regular online communications. On the web link, staff members make suggestions on how independence could be promoted at home as well as how they can work together with the setting for consistency of approach and predictability of routines. A parent commented that with the support of the team she was able to foster her child's independence at home (during meals and dressing times) with sensitivity.

Montessori practice: classroom management

This setting is well managed by the owner/manager in close partnership with the team. There are effective daily checks, policies, procedures and routines in place to ensure that all those involved with this establishment understand and follow the clear guidelines in place. This good practice promotes the smooth running of the learning environments and ensures that the children's wellbeing is focused on. A staff rota is displayed in the classroom, and is regularly checked by the team and adhered to. Due to this meticulous planning children are well supported in both environments, in and outdoors, and on outings.

The extended drop off and collection times promote a calm beginning and end of the day. It also allows time for the staff to pay close attention to individual children or parents. For example, during the first accreditation visit a child was unsure about letting go of her mother at the beginning of the session. The key person spent time with the child and the mother to ensure that this transition went smoothly. The length of the work cycles, both in the morning and afternoon, ensures that the same quality of provision is afforded to all children irrespective of their hours of attendance. Home and lunch time transitions are effectively managed. The children and staff are well versed with these routines and this common understanding supports smooth transitions from one period to another.



The vertical grouping of children, a cornerstone of the Montessori philosophy, is fully integrated in the daily practice. Children from the age of 2 to 5 years of age work and play in harmony. Sleeping facilities are available for those who may need a rest during the course of the day. Additional activities such as visits to the local woodland, yoga, cooking and music are delivered by the staff members. Children are given opportunities to participate in all the activities on offer. However, their wish not to join in is respected.

Montessori Practice: links with parents, including reports and records

Links with parents are exemplary. Parents interviewed during both visits expressed high levels of satisfaction with their involvement in their child's learning journey. The team has a clear understanding of their obligation to liaise with parents and other agencies. There are ample opportunities for the parents to have conversations during drop off and collection times and during twice yearly meetings. Parents' views on their child's development are sought before the child starts and at various points throughout the child's time at the setting. Their input is valued and acted upon, and they feel recognized as their child's first and foremost educators.

The mandatory two year old EYFS progress check is written by the key team in close collaboration with the parents. Short summative reports are produced and shared with parents twice during the academic year. These, according to the parents, are informative and reflect their child's personality and development. The software used to chart children's progress provides parents with daily access to their child's learning and development profile and they can make comments. The key team responds promptly to comments made. This good practice enables parents to feel listened to and valued. A final report and the child's profile as captured by the record-keeping software is, with the parent's consent, shared with the next school when the child leaves. The role of the key team is well defined, understood and followed by all.

There is a constant flow of information from the setting to the parents via the website, newsletters, formal and informal meetings, daily conversations and joint activities: for example, parents are invited in to share cultural celebrations, to join their child for lunch on their birthday and to talk to the children about their backgrounds and jobs.

Staffing:

The comprehensive range of policies and procedures in place, together with the clear organizational framework, ensures that every member of the team knows that their daily practices are underpinned by a well thought through structure. The owner/manager has a clear vision for this establishment. It is set around five core values: discovery, identity, trust, pleasure and stability. These values are referred to regularly in staff meetings to ensure common understanding and adherence amongst the team. Staff meetings are recorded.



Induction procedures are in place. New members of the team are supported in developing a sound understanding of the setting's practices and the policies and procedures in place. Job descriptions are differentiated according to staff roles and responsibilities.

Continued professional development is strongly supported and training needs are identified via staff appraisals, termly reviews and peer observations. The senior management responds quickly and effectively when an area for development has been identified, by either arranging in-house training or seeking it externally. Shared feedback from courses attended by individual members enriches the experience of all those who work at this setting.

Areas for the development of the setting are identified termly. These are discussed amongst the team, planned, implemented and their impact measured. The areas of development for the current year have been the MEAB accreditation process, website development and training in how observations can be used effectively to identify the learning that has taken place and possible lines of development for the child.

The setting currently employs 17 members of staff, including two chefs. Of the teaching staff, five hold the Montessori early years diploma, three hold Qualified Teacher Status and one holds Early Years Professional Status. Four are currently undergoing Montessori training.

The team at this setting work well together for the benefit of all those involved with this establishment – themselves, the children and their families.

Name of Assessor: Rosie Roberts

Date report submitted: First visit – 11th May 2015

Second visit – 15th October 2015