



# **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.

### **Little Sweethearts Montessori School**

St Saviour's Church Hall, Warwick Avenue, London W9 2PT

Date of previous MEAB accreditation: April 2013

Date of first re-accreditation visit: 22 January 2016

Date of second re-accreditation visit: 10 May 2016

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

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

Little Sweethearts Montessori School was first registered in 1995. It is located in the Church Hall on the lower ground floor of St Saviour's within Little Venice, in the London Borough of Westminster. The school has sole use of the Hall, which comprises one large room that is divided into classroom areas by cupboards and shelving, additional classrooms, a kitchen and staff room, office and cloakroom facilities. The setting has access to its neighbouring primary school's playground at specific times during the morning and afternoon when the primary school is not using it, and nearby parks are also visited regularly.

The setting is open from 08.45 to 15.45, term time only. Children attend for a variety of sessions: mornings, afternoons or full-time. There are currently 87 children on roll, and on the day of the second visit 79 children attended the morning session, of whom 44 were under 3 years old. In the afternoon 38 children were in attendance, with 13 under 3 years; 29 children stayed for the full day. The children are grouped by age and key person into classroom areas, although interaction and movement between the age groups is encouraged. One part of the large room is primarily used by the younger 2 year olds, another by the older 2 year olds to 3 year old children, and a third by the



oldest children, 3 to 5 years of age. The staff are also divided into three teams, each based with one of these age ranges in the main room's area and other rooms used primarily by that group of children. Besides the main classroom areas, there are five additional rooms: two art rooms and three other rooms for the youngest children, one of which is where children can sleep after lunch. Each of the main classroom areas is overseen by at least one Montessori qualified lead teacher. The school supports children with additional needs, including those for whom English is an additional language. Children who attend full-time bring their own packed lunch, and snack is provided by the school both mornings and afternoons.

Seventeen members of staff work directly with the children, of whom ten hold an early years Montessori diploma. The Principal is supernumerary, she is the owner/manager of the school and is Montessori qualified with a degree. A deputy assists the Principal with the day to day management of the setting and both work full-time, along with eight other members of the team. On the day of the second visit all staff were present in the morning and the ten full-time staff were present all day.

## Summary

Little Sweethearts provides a learning environment that is prepared well and in accordance with Montessori practices, wherein children are supported to become independent, confident learners. The organisation of the space into classrooms creates areas where the children feel secure and have access to materials and activities that provide for all areas of the curriculum according to their stages of development. The free movement of children between the classrooms is facilitated through encouraging older children to mentor younger ones, and promoting social interaction between the different groups. This arrangement follows the recommendation made at the previous MEAB accreditation. The recommendations made during the first re-accreditation visit have also been addressed. Documented observations of staff, mainly peer to peer observation, have begun to be carried out, together with documented staff supervision meetings. These are planned to continue, and are beginning to provide useful pointers for staff development and training.

Partnership with parents is very strong, and links between home and school are promoted through verbal and written communication. The staff, under the effective leadership of the Principal, are committed to exemplary practice and continued professional development, and benefit from working in small, supportive teams to deliver high quality provision to the children in their care.

***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:**

- it is recommended that the school continues to develop and embed the practice of staff supervision meetings and peer observations to support the team's self-evaluation and focused improvement.

**Philosophy:**

Little Sweethearts offers high quality Montessori provision in a well-prepared learning environment. The Principal and her team are committed to the Montessori ethos, as demonstrated by the freedom they offer the children to choose their activities, and the trust and respect they show towards the children and their families. For example, during the first re-accreditation visit new children were given time one to one with their key person and choice of activity to help them settle in, including one new child who was supported by an adult to follow their inner need to climb up and down stairs. The staff in each of the classroom areas are well led by Montessori qualified practitioners, and all are proactive in ensuring that the children's individual needs are met and that their self-esteem and self-discipline develop.

The commitment to Montessori philosophy is outlined in the school prospectus, on the website and information boards, and in the Montessori training offered to new staff. Staff review the principles at their weekly meetings, and parents also receive literature on the approach and updates with their termly newsletter.

**Learning and Development:**

Children have access to the areas of learning of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) and Montessori curriculum in their classroom areas that are relevant to their ages and stages of development. For example, the younger 2 year olds have early sensorial and maths materials available, together with pouring and transferring activities, and art and book areas, whereas the classroom area for the oldest children has materials appropriate to their age, including books for early reading. All the materials are attractively displayed on open shelving and organised by curriculum area, and picture coding on the trays and shelves for the youngest children helps them know where to return their work, thus aiding their independence and self-esteem.

During the work cycle, which is at least 2½ hours in the morning, the children move freely within their classroom area, or to another should they so choose. Similarly, in the afternoon there is continuous provision for self-initiated activities for two and a half hours, with the option during both sessions to join adult-led groups such as French, music, ballet, gym and computer use on specific days. On the day of the second re-accreditation visit a group of seven children freely chose to attend the French and gym clubs, and showed engagement in learning language and physical skills during these



sessions.

Shortly before and after lunch a group of children staying for the full day are taken out to the nearby primary school's playground or local park. This is done on a rota basis to ensure that all the children who attend full-time have access to the outdoors at some point during the day, and those who attend part-time are taken out regularly. During the second visit both groups visited the park, despite the rain, and were able to appreciate vehicles such as barges on the canal, a police car and fire engine. In better weather, art resources and other activities are often taken to the primary school's playground so that children have the opportunity to use these indoor materials on a larger scale.

Termly planning is drawn up for each room and age group; this process is led by the Montessori qualified staff in each area. On the day of the first visit the older 2 year olds and younger 3 year olds had a focus on healthy food, with a display of fruit and vegetables and matching cards, while the older 3 and 4 year olds were finding out about their families and bodies by drawing a picture of their family (having previously brought in photographs) and measuring their height. Children spontaneously wanted to share their thoughts and ideas, showing confidence and high levels of social interaction. Adults support children very effectively in their use of the learning environment through well managed, planned or spontaneous, individual and small group work, presentation of new materials when appropriate, and reinforcement of the ground rules.

A variety of observation methods, including a half-termly extended narrative, are used by all the teaching staff, who are all key persons. These are used to assess children's progress within the Montessori curriculum and EYFS, and are transferred to the child's individual records by the classroom lead teachers. The children's Learning Journeys comprise a comprehensive record of their progress in both the EYFS and Montessori areas of learning and development, and these evidence the very good progress that the children make from their starting points. The mandatory two year progress checks are carried out by the lead teachers and discussed with parents; these highlight any potential areas for development. Summative assessments written by the lead teachers at the end of the academic year are also shared with parents and form the basis for transition to school reports.

Staff allocated to each of the three age groups and their class areas work closely as a team, and give regular verbal feedback to each other so as to constantly improve their practice. Similarly, the Principal strives to support staff and build on the high quality of Montessori educational provision that they offer. The introduction of documented staff observations is helping to formalise this self-evaluation and clarify lines of future development.

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

The large room has been thoughtfully divided into classroom areas using cupboards and



shelving, while access between them is made easy, which gives a sense of free flow. Each classroom area is very well resourced for the number and ages of the children it provides for and offers each child a secure base with its own teaching staff, snack area and routines. The materials are very clearly and appealingly laid out on low shelves, and the children's high levels of engagement as they work with their chosen activities demonstrates the care and attention to detail taken by the staff in the preparation of this environment.

Children can choose to work at low tables or mats on the floor, and also have space in each area to sit comfortably on cushions to look at books or rest. The youngest 2 year olds have a classroom area in the large hall, for activities of everyday living, art and snack, and a separate area with a book corner and construction activities. They also have access via a safety gate to two other rooms, one with books and early sensorial materials and another with art activities. The first of these is where children can sleep after lunch. This arrangement gives the children the opportunity for freedom of movement, and also the chance to spend time in smaller class groups. On the day of the first re-accreditation visit, a new child in this group was happily engaged with songs and movement to music with instruments, enjoying one to one time with a practitioner who knew that this would help the child settle. The older 2 to 3 year olds have a large classroom area which has all curriculum areas accessible to them, and also comprises a section with tables which are used for their snack. All children staying for lunch at the setting eat their meal here. The 3 to 5 year olds have their classroom area on a stage area, accessed by steps, where they also have their snack area and an adjoining art room.

Although free flow to an outdoor area is not possible at these premises, staff make sure that all the children who stay for the full day can enjoy some time outside. Trips are also organised by age group, and on the day of the second visit the 3 to 5 year olds were looking forward to visiting the London Aquarium, to link with their topic of life under the sea.

The practitioners in each classroom have a weekly staff meeting, and the benefits of this close team work are evident in the careful planning and preparation of the environment.

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

Independence is fostered through the freedom children enjoy throughout the work cycles, during which time they can choose their activities, with whom they wish to work and where. Some children choose to work together: for example, on the day of the first re-accreditation visit two children played very collaboratively with construction blocks, to which they added Montessori cylinders, while three children were shown by a practitioner how to combine some sensorial materials.



Great emphasis is placed on showing children how to care for themselves and their learning environment from the moment they first join the setting (for example, by returning trays to the shelves, using a tissue, washing hands and helping themselves to snack). It is evident from the adult/child interactions and self-reliance of the children that the staff trust and respect the children's growing independence and that they set up the environment to fully support this development. At snack and lunch times children are encouraged to be independent in pouring their drink, they unpack the food from their lunch bags with little assistance and use cutlery. The younger 2 year old children have group snack as a way of introducing them to the skills of pouring and serving themselves at the table, whilst all the other children have a snack table in their classroom area that they can access freely.

Parents comment very favourably on the confidence and autonomy of their children at home, especially with their self-care. They receive literature, including an informative termly newsletter, to support them in implementing this at home.

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

The Principal and her team work very closely together, and the weekly staff meetings and classroom team meetings ensure that there is a shared vision and approach. Daily informal feedback between the Principal and the staff, and between practitioners in the classrooms, is valuable as a learning tool. The recent implementation of documented peer observations is helping to provide more detailed evidence for the setting's self-improvement.

The deployment of staff in the different classrooms helps ensure close supervision of, and continuity of care for, each child. The adults show very respectful, supportive behaviour towards the children and the reinforcement of the ground rules is carried out in a positive way; individual and group presentations are of a high standard and the short circle times at the end of each work cycle are age appropriate. During the second re-accreditation visit the oldest group of children were spontaneously drawn to an adult-led activity involving the life cycle of the butterfly. They had been observing the metamorphosis from caterpillars to chrysalides, and were keen to watch these being transferred to a net container ready for the butterflies to emerge. The care and wonder shown by the children reflected the respect they had towards their room leader. Although the children are grouped in the classroom areas by age, interaction across the age range is encouraged and some older children in particular help the younger ones. Vertical grouping is also evident when siblings choose to be together.

Lunch is well managed. Members of staff sit with the children to encourage independence, table manners and social interaction. Children who need to sleep are appropriately supervised; on the day of the second visit three children had an afternoon sleep. Children who only attend the afternoon session arrive after having had their lunch and settle easily to their chosen activities within their classroom area. It is evident that the teams work flexibly and well together, with each adult aware of their



responsibilities; this leads to a calm, well ordered environment, with very good classroom management.

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

Parents value the close links with the school; they are able to request a meeting with a teacher or the Principal and enjoy finding out about their child's progress. They comment on how well the key person knows their child and can discuss their strengths and suggest how to support the child further. The well-documented Learning Journeys are updated by the Montessori qualified teachers with the support of the key person. These are shared with parents at the twice-yearly progress evenings, and parents take home their child's art folder on a weekly basis.

The Principal and practitioners place great emphasis on communication with parents, sharing Montessori practice so as to support individual children's needs, and inviting parents to support with project work on such topics as cultural festivals. Parents appreciate the wealth of information displayed on notice boards, which include facets of Montessori philosophy, topics covered, photographs and children's work. Newsletters and daily contact with the Principal also strengthen the links between the school and home.

### **Staffing:**

Staff members are managed effectively by the Principal, who shows great commitment to the wellbeing and progress of all the children in her care. The deputy head, who is also responsible for overseeing the young 2 year olds classroom provision, shares the day to day management responsibilities and is also an excellent role-model for staff. Weekly minuted whole team meetings ensure that all practitioners share the school's vision and are updated on policies and practice. The individual classroom meetings focus on planning for their specific groups of children and the preparation of their respective environments. Practitioners comment on the strength of team work within their rooms.

Staff training and continuing professional development (CPD) are actively promoted, including regular attendance at courses provided by Montessori Centre International and the local authority. The induction procedures are thorough and the clear job descriptions ensure staff know their responsibilities. Since the first re-accreditation visit the implementation of documented staff observations is beginning to aid the team's reflective practice. Documented supervisions have also been introduced to provide time for each team member to talk with a senior member of staff, and it is recommended that both these aspects of effective management continue to be developed. Together with the appraisals already in place, they are helping to provide pointers for future development.



Eleven members of staff, including the Principal, have a Montessori diploma, and one is qualified in early years to level 3. The other practitioners have undertaken training in childcare and most have considerable experience at the school.

The strong commitment of the Principal to Montessori practice, combined with the enthusiasm of the team, ensure that children at Little Sweethearts receive exemplary care and education.

Name of Assessor: Mary Lazo

Date report submitted: First visit – 26<sup>th</sup> January 2016

Second visit – 11<sup>th</sup> May 2016