



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.

Living Spring Montessori

St Michael’s Church Annex, St Michael’s Road, Cricklewood, London NW2 6XG

Date of the first re-accreditation visit: 12 November 2013

Date of the second re-accreditation visit: 7 March 2014

Date of previous MEAB accreditation: July 2009

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

Description of the school:

Living Spring Montessori school is situated in a residential area of the London Borough of Brent. It was established in 2004 and operates from a large church annex. The school has sole use of the premises, which includes three large rooms, a spacious lobby, toilet facilities for each age range, kitchens, an office and outside play areas. In recent refurbishments the school has added a staff room, an outdoor play area for the youngest children, and also an indoor area for small group activities. The school serves families living in the local areas of Cricklewood and Dollis Hill.

The setting has the capacity for 58 children to attend on any one day; with 12 babies up to 18 months old in the Nido room, 16 toddlers up to 3 years of age in the Infant Community and 30 children between the ages of 2 ½ and 5 years in the Children’s House. On the day of the second visit there were 51 children attending.

The school operates daily, 47 weeks of the year between 8.00 and 18.00, with an option for children to attend only from 9.00 to 16.00. The majority of children attend two to five full days per week. On the day of the second re-accreditation visit there were 12 babies, 15 toddlers and 24 3 to 5 year olds. Children are provided with breakfast, healthy snacks throughout the day and hot lunches prepared on the premises, as well as afternoon tea. The setting caters for



children with English as an additional language (EAL) and children with special educational needs (SENs) are supported by a designated SENCO.

The proprietor who is also the manager holds a Montessori diploma and is actively involved in the life of the school. She is supported by a deputy manager, also Montessori qualified, who has the SENCO role, and has worked closely with the proprietor ever since the school was established, and together they take responsibility for children's learning, development and well being. All the 17 staff are employed full time, 14 of them work directly with children and support their learning and development. They hold relevant early years' qualifications, with the majority having Montessori diplomas. They are supported by an office manager, a cook and a cleaner.

Summary

Living Spring Montessori School provides a rich Montessori learning environment for all the children attending. Staff pride themselves on the close links that they foster with parents and carers. The proprietor and deputy manager work closely together to provide an effective leadership, which reflects their sound understanding of the Montessori philosophy, as outlined in the aims of the setting.

Staff are committed to offering the best possible learning experiences for each child, nurturing their unique potential and dispositions. The school environment is prepared with exceptional attention to detail and knowledge of individual children's needs and interests. The staff members' focus is on children's independence and this is reflected in the organization of the rooms and of the learning resources available to the three age groups of children; the Nido, the Infant Community and the Children's House. Observation of children is at the heart of the assessment and planning process and each child's progress is closely monitored. All children benefit from daily access to the outdoors, with babies and toddlers being taken for walks to the local park, library and shops as well as to their outdoor classroom.

Staff are carefully selected to provide for the specific needs of each of the three age groups and they are well deployed within the school. They have many opportunities for continued professional development and work well as a team. Under the committed leadership of the proprietor and deputy manager they create a calm and harmonious atmosphere which is conducive to the learning and development of each child.

The school has addressed the recommendations from the previous MEAB accreditation; it has reviewed and developed effective book areas for toddlers and the older children. A designated, all-weather outdoor classroom for the babies and toddlers has also been established, and the children from the Children's House benefit from outdoor play after lunch. The recommendations made during the first re-accreditation visit were addressed. The setting was particularly successful in reflecting on the nature of observations undertaken by the practitioners. They found a creative solution in introducing more opportunities for the children to engage in spontaneous work in pairs in the Children's House. Whilst progress has been made with the provision available in their outdoor classroom with active support from the parents, free-flow during the morning work cycle for the older children remains an action point for consideration.



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 with the plans for development of the outdoor classroom for the older children to facilitate a vibrant learning environment and enable free-flow during the morning work-cycle.
- Continue to embed opportunities for spontaneous work in pairs and small groups in the Children's House.

Philosophy:

Living Spring Montessori School prides itself on its commitment to offering high quality Montessori provision for the children attending. Its stated aims are: "to serve the immediate needs of the children in our care while providing them with an environment rich in opportunities for exploration and discovery". This is clearly reflected in daily practice and also in the publicity available to parents and visitors. The school is committed to following individual children's needs and interests by ensuring that the learning environment is appropriate for the age as well as developmental stage of each child and that their potential is nurtured appropriately.

Staff work together effectively and ensure that children have freedom of choice of activities within the indoor environment and are given time to repeat and perfect their skills. This reflects their respect and trust in each individual child's ability to manage their learning. For example, the babies who eat solid food have an opportunity to feed themselves, and the toddlers are given plenty of time to put on their shoes when going outside and to serve themselves with snack and lunch whilst one child at each table pours drinks. In the Children's House the staff are working on facilitating access to the outside classroom during the morning work cycle and enabling children's work with, or alongside, their friends.

The school's publicity materials and website clearly demonstrate its commitment to working within the principles and values of the Montessori approach and to sharing these with parents. The notice boards displayed in the lobby provide current information about staff, the regular changes to the menu and other relevant details pertaining to the day to day running of the school. These boards also include information for parents about Montessori practice, such as encouraging children's independence at home, as was seen on the day of the first re-accreditation visit.

Learning and Development:

Children in all three groups have excellent opportunities to develop according to their individual needs and potential. The learning environments are well organized according to the Montessori areas of learning and the staff ensure that they are developmentally appropriate.

In the Nido the children are supported in their daily routines (including feeding and sleeping) on an individual basis. The activities offered are presented on open shelves, which enables these children to make spontaneous and self-initiated choices. They are free to move around the



room and are really well supported in their language development. The children are taken outside daily, weather permitting, for short walks to the local park and to play in their well designed outdoor classroom.

This approach continues in the Infant Community where the choice of activities is wider, including early practical life activities and a book area. These children are helped to develop awareness of personal hygiene and to grow in personal independence, for example when getting dressed and during snack time. Singing, dancing and stories are part of their daily routine. These activities provide effective opportunities for developing and extending children's language skills. They begin to learn how to share, for example during snack or in the outdoor classroom, and are given many appropriate opportunities to develop their small and large movements both inside and outside the classroom during a work cycle, which is about two and half hours long during the morning session and continues after their sleep in the afternoon.

The children in the Children's House benefit from the full range of Montessori activities as they build on the practical skills acquired during their earlier experiences in the setting. They are also introduced to phonics and more formal counting activities, and explore a range of materials which enable them to develop an understanding of other cultures and of the animals and plants found around the world. Their learning would be further enhanced by embedding opportunities to work spontaneously in pairs and with friends.

The individual progress of children is recorded regularly on checklists of Montessori materials, and individual observations link Montessori activities clearly with the learning outcomes identified in the EYFS Development Matters and in the children's records. Following the first re-accreditation visit further consideration was given to the role and nature of focused observations – with emphasis on personal, social and emotional development as well as on communication skills of the children.

Planning for group activities and themes is done by the team on a monthly basis and shared with parents. Adults support children's learning sensitively, and with a great degree of skill, particularly in the Nido and the Infant Community. The deputy manager is an effective Senco and supports the children, their families and staff well in this area.

Prepared Environment: resources and materials

This aspect of the school's practice is exceptional. The environments are prepared with considerable attention to detail; they are maintained to a very high standard and reflect the developmental stages and needs of the children. High levels of cleanliness are maintained across the whole school, and all materials are kept in pristine condition, accessible, plentiful and meet the individual needs of the children. They are changed and adjusted following the evaluation of regular observations of individual children in order to meet their unique needs. Planning for each age group is done by the whole team within each room and includes themes and projects explored in small groups. The recent development of the outdoor resources across all outdoor areas has further enhanced the excellent facilities offered to children in this school.

All children benefit from free access to the learning resources which are made available on open shelves and are organized to meet the individual needs of the children. In the Nido, children's resources are organized appropriately to support the children's emerging skills of making choices. They are changed regularly and focus on children's developing ability to crawl, walk, climb and manipulate objects. The children's language and need for emotional support are



carefully monitored and facilitated on an individual basis. This room has access to its own outdoor area, which is an enclosed and appropriate play area for the babies and toddlers.

The children in the Infant Community continue to build on their developing sensitive periods for order, language, movement and small detail. They are provided with clearly defined Montessori activities available on shelves to facilitate freedom of choice; these include washing, pouring, threading and a range of sensory experiences both inside, whilst preparing snack, and outside during walks in the nearby park and in the outdoor classrooms which they share sometimes with the babies and also with the Children's House. Stories, singing and dancing are the focus of small group activities which are offered to the children in this room throughout the day.

The Children's House classroom is a comprehensively equipped Montessori prepared environment, which is well organised into the individual areas of learning, with more advanced practical life activities, sensorial, arithmetic, literacy and cultural, as well as creative activities. The children have direct access from this room to their garden, which has a playhouse, sandpit and other suitable activities.

Montessori practice: independence

Independence features highly in the school's commitment to support the individual needs of the children. The adults within the setting give them time and trust to develop their independence gradually, in line with their capabilities. For example, all children use pottery and glass during meal times, the older babies are given time to feed themselves during snacks and lunchtime, the toddlers have plenty of time to put on their shoes and coats when going outside, they serve and feed themselves and clear up afterwards. The older children have independence in respect of personal hygiene and begin to take on small tasks of responsibility such as turning off the light after the use of the toilet.

The independence across all age groups is supported by freedom of choice and by the adults understanding that it takes time to develop competence and ability to do things well. They encourage in a calm and gentle manner and remind everyone of the need to be kind and respectful to each other. Positive language is used to promote appropriate behaviour and adults are excellent role models for the children. Further opportunities for the children in the Children's House to play and work with friends should be explored and facilitated to enhance their developing social awareness and co-operation.

Parents are encouraged to give similar opportunities for independence at home; regular parent evenings and well considered newsletters suggest activities and opportunities to support their children at home in line with the nursery practices. The school notice board includes specific information for parents relating not only to school activities, but also to opportunities to make links between the home and the setting.

All children across the school are provided with appropriate role models and the opportunity for spontaneous engagement with activities in the prepared environment. These conditions support effectively their growing sense of self and wellbeing, as well as their sense of belonging.



Montessori practice: classroom management

The setting is competently and respectfully led by the proprietor and deputy manager. Each room's team works together to provide the best possible learning experiences for the children in their care. Excellent communication within individual teams and also across all the staff and management at the school fully supports the effective and consistent practices in the setting and its liaison with parents. There is a spirit of camaraderie and the children benefit from the harmonious atmosphere that this creates.

Many of the staff have worked in the setting for several years and are aware of their responsibilities within each classroom and across the school, as a result it runs like a 'well oiled machine'. The mixed age range of children in the Children's House has the potential of helping to meet the changing social needs of this age group, particularly if arrangements for working in pairs and spontaneous small groups are further embedded in the daily life of the classroom.

Key persons are allocated to individual children, however all team members within each room know individual children well and are able to both support their learning and development effectively and to share their progress with parents.

The babies' individual rhythms are followed in the Nido with respect to resting, going outside, doing activities and having snack. All the babies eat lunch together. The toddlers have a two to two and half hour work cycle in the morning and a little less in the afternoon. They get ready to go outside in groups of four from around 10.30. On their return indoors, they have a story group which is adult-led and then slowly prepare for lunch. They all rest after lunch. When they wake up they have a snack and more opportunities to play freely with the activities on offer and sometimes use the playroom for small group activities.

In the Children's House the work cycle runs for the duration of the whole morning, for three to three and half hours, and currently the staff are working on facilitating free-flow access to the outdoor classroom. This is one of the areas for further consideration. During the morning the children work on their own or participate in small group activities organized by the teachers.

The children prepare for lunch, cooked daily on the premises, which they share with their teachers between 12.00pm to 1.00pm. They go outside after lunch and return to the classroom at around 14.00 when the afternoon work cycle starts.

Staff are familiar with the policies and procedures implemented within the setting.

Montessori Practice: links with parents, including reports and records

Parents speak highly of the setting and of the staff's knowledge of their children, and there is a good rapport between the school and the parent body. They are very satisfied with the written information provided by the school about their individual children, including daily notebook entries provided for parents of the youngest children, and, as a result, many of them ensure that all the children within their family benefit from attending Living Spring. They know their child's key person but are also satisfied that all members of the room's team are familiar with their child. Parents value this approach to their child's learning and development, appreciating the opportunity their children have to forge meaningful relationships with all the team members, which results in them being less dependent on one key person. This deployment of staff



contributes significantly to the harmonious operation of the school.

Children's records are shared with parents regularly and they also have an opportunity to contribute to them. The school organizes regular social events for the families as well as meetings to discuss their child's progress and Montessori publications are available for parents to borrow. Informative newsletters are published and staff communicate with parents regularly either in the morning or at the end of the day, or via email.

The setting bases its mandatory two year old progress check on sound knowledge of the children before they move from the Infant Community to the Children's House. Transition reports are prepared for the oldest children leaving for entry to primary school.

Following the recommendations from the first re-accreditation visit regarding the development of the outdoor classroom for the older children, the management has been working with the parents to fund redevelopment of the outdoor area. This initiative has been very positive with large parent involvement and a close school/parent partnership.

Staffing:

The proprietor and deputy manager work closely together and guide the team effectively in delivering Montessori education to the children in their care. The whole team strives to improve their provision and this commitment to on-going development is evident in the setting's planning.

There is a comprehensive induction programme and a well established staff appraisal process which includes peer review. The room teams meet regularly and also participate in whole school staff meetings, which are recorded in writing. The manager also supports the staff through her regular observations and feedback.

The staff are exceptionally well qualified: of the 14 team members eight have first degrees and also Montessori diplomas, whilst several also hold other early years qualifications and one is a qualified nurse. They are supported by a team of four staff who ensure the children are provided with good food and benefit from clean facilities and have their essential needs met.

The setting's continued development programme over the past five years has been extensive and benefitted the whole school. The teamwork is excellent and is evident in the school's on-going provision of high quality Montessori education for the children who attend.

Name of Assessors: Marta Pogoda and Barbara Isaacs

Date of report: First visit: 23 November 2013
Second visit: 21 March 2014