

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 relevant 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 and considered 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.

Receiving accreditation carries the expectation that settings will continue to work on the issues highlighted in this report and will remain committed to the ongoing development of their practice. Furthermore, that they will report to the MEAB office any relevant changes such as to premises address, ownership, hours of operation or to the age range of children attending.

Dulwich Montessori Nursery School

St Stephen’s Church Hall, College Road, London SE21 7HW

Date of previous MEAB accreditation: November 2014

Date of first reaccreditation visit: 6 November 2017

Date of second reaccreditation visit: 21 February 2018

This accreditation is valid until June 2022

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

Description of the nursery:

Dulwich Montessori Nursery School opened in 1994 and has been under the present ownership since 2009. It is privately owned, being part of a group of four Montessori nurseries, and is currently being re-registered as a limited company. The nursery is set in a church hall in Dulwich, which is in the London Borough of Southwark. It has one large open-plan classroom, cloakroom facilities, a staff kitchen and easy access to a secure walled garden. The premises are shared; therefore, staff members are required to pack away furniture and resources daily. However, the nursery has sole use during its opening hours. Regular visits are made with the children to the nearby woods, library and playground.

The nursery is open for 38 weeks of the year from 08.00 to 15.00 on Mondays to Thursdays, and 08.30 to 13.00 on Fridays. It offers extended hours until 18:00 and a holiday club by providing the opportunity for its children to transfer to the nearby sister setting, Dulwich Oaks Montessori Nursery, which is also part of the nursery group. This additional provision is not being considered as part of this reaccreditation. The number of children enrolled is 56 and the setting can cater for a maximum of 40 children at any one time. On the day of the second reaccreditation visit 38 children attended in the morning and 29 in the afternoon. No children attended only for the afternoon; however, there is the option to do so. Those who stay for lunch have a hot meal (which is provided by an external catering company) or they bring in their own packed lunch. The setting can accommodate children with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and children with English as an additional language (EAL).

There are 11 members of staff that regularly attend, nine work full-time. One has a level 6 qualification, six hold Montessori qualifications and three hold other early years' qualifications. The proprietors oversee some aspects of management; however, the Head Teacher and Deputy Head manage the setting on a day to day basis and cover for each other's absence. On the day of the second visit ten staff and a Montessori student teacher were present in the morning, with nine staff and the student teacher remaining for the afternoon.

Summary

Dulwich Montessori Nursery School is committed to following the Montessori principles and approach to learning. The large and attractive open-plan classroom is well designed to offer an extensive range of activities and opportunities for children to enjoy their learning. Staff members are particularly skilled at promoting children's independence. Most children show high levels of confidence and enjoy making their own choices and decisions in the environment. Staff members know children well and plan interesting activities and experiences to support them to develop new skills. The knowledgeable Head Teacher and dedicated teaching team frequently reflect on their practice and make changes to ensure better outcomes for children. For example, they have recently redesigned the layout of the classroom to create a cosy area that is appealing and exciting to the younger children, which is working extremely well.

Following the recommendations made at the previous MEAB accreditation staff members now regularly carry out peer to peer observations to help them improve the quality of their teaching. They have also made positive changes to how they manage the number of children that use the outdoor learning environment at any one time, which means that it is less crowded and that children have the space and time to enjoy full engagement with its range of exciting experiences.

Following the first reaccreditation visit the teaching team has made significant changes to lengthen the morning work cycle, which is now nearly three hours long. This has been achieved by moving additional activities to the afternoon session. This

positive development has created the opportunity for children's purposeful engagement and spontaneous learning. However, this change has had an impact on the afternoon session and therefore staff members are encouraged to continue to reflect on the daily routines.

It was also recommended at the first visit that staff members continued to develop and embed their use of the recently adopted online planning and record-keeping system, to ensure that all staff members consistently plan appropriate next steps for children. Good progress has been made in this area and further improvements should evolve as staff members continue to build on their confidence and experience in this aspect of practice.

Staff members have also strengthened links with parents and other professionals to develop more precise plans and strategies to help children who require additional support. As a result, there is evidence that these children have made steady progress and accurate next steps and targets are in place to further support their ongoing needs. Partnership with parents is now outstanding; many express how happy they are with the provision and feel that their children are making good progress both personally, emotionally and in relation to their learning. Parents express how involved they feel with their children's learning and comment that there is a strong sense of community at the nursery.

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 size and organisation of some group activities to ensure that the length of the activity is appropriate for the children and that it effectively focuses on their engagement and learning. Furthermore, continue to consider how to fully support children in their choice of whether to join in group activities or not; and
- continue to reflect upon the organisation of the transition period after lunchtime to ensure that children are supported effectively at this time.

Philosophy:

The adults at Dulwich Montessori Nursery School are enthusiastic about providing good quality Montessori education which encompasses the key aspects of the philosophy. Staff members express their commitment to 'following the child', helping each one to fulfil their unique potential. They do this by fostering respectful relationships with the children and by supporting them to make independent choices in the setting. There is a real emphasis on helping children to become active learners and the adults guide children effectively to build on their existing skills. Children are encouraged to help care for the classroom by arranging flowers, and they prepare their own snack and serve their own lunch. These responsibilities encourage children to have a sense of ownership

and to feel involved, which instils in them a respect for their learning environment. As all the children aged between 2 and 5 years share the one large classroom there are many opportunities for them to learn from one another. Older children help younger children to remember where different resources belong, and younger children are motivated and inspired by the actions of their older peers.

Dulwich Montessori Nursery School also offers a highly engaging and interactive Forest School programme. The teachers strongly advocate the principles of effective outdoor learning and passionately describe the benefits of it for children's emotional wellbeing, physical health, critical thinking skills and overall development. The Montessori philosophy is clearly written about in the nursery's prospectus, in the extensive policies and procedures and on the website, which helps extend parents' and staff knowledge and understanding of the ethos.

Learning and Development:

The spacious classroom is set up into different and inviting zones that suitably provide very good learning opportunities across all areas of the curriculum. Children thoroughly enjoy independently selecting resources to play with and like being able to freely choose whether to work indoors or outside. Staff members generally liaise well with one another and follow a rota to take turns to work indoors or out. Following a recommendation from the previous MEAB accreditation, staff members ensure that the outdoor area does not get too crowded and that all children have an equal chance to enjoy learning in this space. In the classroom there is a good balance between child-initiated and adult-led learning. For example, on the day of the first reaccreditation visit, children thoroughly enjoyed concentrating on self-chosen activities alone. They were equally responsive to shared experiences and particularly enjoyed participating in a group science experiment. During the group presentation, the teacher skillfully captured the children's attention as she encouraged them to describe objects and predict whether they would sink or float. The children had lots of fun and demonstrated attentive listening skills along with good emerging descriptive language and communication skills. Children's creativity was also fully encouraged whilst painting and decorating clay stones, and during acting out different narratives when playing outside.

All the children have the opportunity to participate in teacher-led cooking, French and science experiment groups during the afternoon, as well as to visit the playground or library. Following a recommendation from the first visit, the additional activities offered (which include music, tennis, yoga and sport) have now been moved to the afternoon session, making the morning work cycle close to three hours. This change means that opportunities for children to freely choose what to work and play with in the afternoon are now more limited. However, as all children currently attend morning sessions, they now all benefit from the longer uninterrupted work cycle during the morning. On the day of the second visit, children participated in a large group cooking activity in the afternoon, making Chinese noodles to support their learning about Chinese New Year. Although the quality of the teaching was strong – the teacher was extremely enthusiastic and clear with her instructions – the size of the group was too large, making it challenging to ensure that all the children remained purposefully engaged. It is

recommended that staff members continue to consider how group activities are organised and give regard to ensuring that children have real choice of whether to join or not.

There are opportunities for children to visit the local woods usually twice a week. On the day of the second visit, a group of 14 children and four members of staff visited the woods for a Forest School session. This was exceptionally well planned, with children showing excellent awareness of road safety when crossing the road and walking to the woods. During the session, the children enjoyed listening to a story about the Chinese dragon and why Chinese New Year is celebrated. They enjoyed dancing through the trees to Chinese music under a beautifully decorated dragon head and long fabric body that they had previously made. During this magical experience they showed high levels of excitement and motivation. They also enjoyed having a snack under the trees and drinking hot chocolate to keep warm.

On the day of the first visit, after the children had finished their lunch, there was a period of time when some were not appropriately engaged in meaningful activities. Although the adults have made improvements to the flow of the daily routine, it is evident that this transition continues to be a busy and challenging part of the day. It is therefore recommended that staff members further reflect on the organisation of this period, to ensure that staff deployment is fully optimised in supporting children effectively as they begin their afternoon session or get ready to go home.

The long term planning is compiled collaboratively by the team annually and members of staff meet regularly to share ideas for topics. The adults take turns in pairs to devise a weekly activity planning document, which incorporates effectively areas of both the Montessori curriculum and of the Early Years Foundation Stage learning goals. Key persons have the responsibility of devising individual planning for their key children, tracking their progress and sharing observations with each child's parents. The nursery has recently started using a secure online planning and record-keeping system. During the first visit it was recommended that staff members continued to develop their use of this and, in particular, that the Head Teacher and Deputy Head continue to monitor that all staff are consistently planning appropriate next steps for children. At the second visit it was evident that this progress has been made, staff members are now planning appropriately to support children's continuous learning.

The nursery is inclusive; it frequently celebrates a range of cultural festivals and often invites parents to participate in such celebrations. It also supports children with EAL and those with SEND. During the first visit it was recommended that the nursery continued to develop and strengthen its partnerships with parents and outside professionals to further support and more precisely plan for children who require additional help. It was also suggested that the team continued to look at staff deployment and how the adults support one another to assist children that are having difficulty settling in or who require extra support with their learning. At the second visit, clear progress with these recommendations was seen – the adults were working more collaboratively with one another, with parents and with other professionals to ensure that these children benefit from closer support and focused targets to nurture them and provide for their additional needs.

Prepared Environment: resources and materials

The spacious and well-planned classroom is full of interesting activities, resources and displays of children's work, for example, there is a charming collection of children's individual art which is displayed along with the classroom ground rules. The room is clearly arranged according to the different areas of learning. Each area is separated by low shelves and cabinets, from which children can easily access the resources. Sliding partitions can also be used to divide up this large room. If children get tired at any point in the day, a mattress and blanket are provided in the quiet area for them to rest or sleep.

There is a good range of complete Montessori materials across all areas of the curriculum. At the first reaccreditation visit it was suggested that the team should review the range of materials available in the cultural area, to ensure there is sufficient variety and challenge for the age range and interests of all the children, as on the day of the first visit this area mainly consisted of resources that related to the current weekly theme which was 'The Sun'. On the day of the second visit there was a much wider range of interesting resources to support children's understanding of the world, including mapping, volcano and planet related activities. Having recently reviewed the effectiveness of the learning environment, the team has created additional activities and areas, such as looking at books under a cosy canopy and making play dough in the messy play area. The team should continue to review and enhance the learning environment to match to the emerging needs and interests of the children.

In addition to the varied opportunities indoors, children have free flow access to the small and stimulating walled garden. On the day of the first visit children delighted in engaging in role play in the mud kitchen and in the large shed. They also had fun exploring different volumes and capacities in the water tray and mark-making with large chalks. Children's physical skills and co-ordination are equally well supported through opportunities to play on tricycles, rocking toys and on a trampoline. All staff members contribute towards creating new activities and maintaining the prepared environment, moreover, they work effectively together to set it up and pack it away each day. The children also help with caring for the classroom, which builds their appreciation for their very engaging learning environment.

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

The nursery is effective at supporting children's growing independence. On arrival they are encouraged to hang up their coats and as they enter the classroom they self-register, finding their name on their unique 'leaf' name card. During the morning work cycle children are provided with sufficient freedom and time to make independent choices and to repeat activities of their choosing. It is recommended that staff members continue to review the afternoon routine in order to ensure that this session also offers the children the same level of independence and freedom of choice, particularly in relation to organised group activities and their size.

During both sessions the children have the opportunity to be involved in preparing snack by cutting fruits and spreading butter on bread, which they are free to have when they wish. Children's independence is also encouraged during lunchtime as they help to set the tables, serve their own food and wash up their own plates. They have a growing understanding of good hygiene and are encouraged to learn to manage their personal care, for example to wash their hands before eating. Staff members support children in following the setting's ground rules and children respond well to their discussions and reminders. Staff members offer children encouragement and praise for their efforts, which builds their self-esteem and respect for self. They act as good role models and support children to negotiate and discuss their intentions, which helps them build respect for one another.

The nursery is committed to working closely with parents to develop children's independence at home, and parents say that they have seen significant changes in their children's independence, confidence and desire to do things for themselves since they have been at the nursery.

Montessori Practice: links with parents, including reports and records

Partnership with parents is excellent. Many express how much they appreciate the levels of communication with staff and that they feel appropriately involved in their children's learning. Each key person is responsible for sharing information with the child's parents through verbal daily feedback and by updating the child's online record weekly, which parents have password-protected access to. Parents express satisfaction with this digital system and many comment that it offers valuable insight into their child's day at nursery. They can also request a meeting with staff members to discuss their child's learning and development.

Parents also speak positively about when their child settled in at the nursery. They describe how staff sought lots of information about their child's interests and involved them in completing an initial assessment to gain an idea of the child's starting points and any potential gaps in their learning. In addition, parents comment on how much they enjoy receiving the regular newsletters that provide them with important information about upcoming events.

The nursery also completes the mandatory two year old progress check, which is shared with the child's parents, and compiles regular progress reports as well as transition reports when children leave to attend a new setting. In addition to helping to celebrate cultural festivals throughout the year, parents are invited in to view their children's artwork at the end of the academic year and to celebrate the progress and achievements of those who are moving on to school. At the time of the first reaccreditation visit the nursery was encouraging parents to come in and talk to the children about their occupations, thus further strengthening partnerships.

Staff: qualifications, deployment, and performance management

The experienced and dedicated Head Teacher uses a good system for the nursery's self-evaluation. Along with the team, she frequently reflects on practice to ensure positive changes are made to drive improvements at the nursery. She has a clear vision of the nursery's strengths, challenges and areas it would like to continue to develop, with a well-defined development plan in place. For example, she would like the team to receive further behaviour management training and gain a deeper understanding of how to support children with a range of additional needs. A member of staff has recently embarked on Forest School Leader training, and there is also a strong current focus on further development of this aspect of the provision.

The recruitment system is thorough and effective. When new members join the team they have an in-depth induction programme, they receive a staff handbook and information on the Montessori approach. Staff members' performance is regularly monitored through supervision meetings, peer to peer observations and annual appraisals, all overseen by the Head Teacher. Through regular staff meetings, ongoing discussions and occasional in-house training, non-Montessori qualified staff are well supported to develop their knowledge and understanding of the Montessori philosophy. There is a strong commitment to promoting staff members' continuing professional development. They attend annual Montessori conferences, courses run by the local borough, and also complete online training.

On the day of the first reaccreditation visit the team was settling down after some significant changes, with many newcomers to it. During the second visit effective team work was evident for much of the day. Staff members develop trusting relationships with children and parents and are highly supportive in encouraging children's independence and in helping to build their self-confidence. They express their motivation to assist each individual child's holistic development through the careful implementation of the Montessori philosophy.

Name of Assessor: Amy Mckenzie

Date report submitted: First visit – 8 November 2017

Second visit – 23 February 2018