

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.

Elm Park Nursery

90 Clarence Avenue, Clapham, London SW4 8JR

Date of first accreditation visit: 26 June 2017

Date of second accreditation visit: 10 January 2018

This accreditation is valid until June 2022

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

Description of the nursery:

Elm Park Nursery is situated in the London Borough of Lambeth, and is located in a large detached Edwardian house, which has three floors and car parking in front. The ground floor comprises a reception hall, a kitchen and five classrooms for children up to the age of 3 years. Two of these classrooms have direct access to the garden, which can also be reached from the hall. The first floor has an office and three classrooms for the 3 to 4 year olds. The second floor has two classrooms for the 4 to 5 year olds. This report only covers the provision for children in the 3 to 5 years age range. At the back of the premises is the large leafy garden, with paving, grass and bark surfaces, an extra office and staff room. Elm Park Nursery is privately owned. It opened in 1991 and re-registered in 2012 under the same ownership. It is part of a group of two Montessori nurseries, the other being in Wandsworth.

The nursery offers full-time places from 08.00 to 18.00, Monday to Friday, for 48 weeks a year, with the option of a shorter day finishing at 12.30. The children all attend for a minimum of two days a week. There are 150 children currently on the roll, of these, 45 are in the 3 to 5 years age range. Up to 96 can attend at any one time. On the day of the second accreditation visit there were 68 children present during the morning and 66 in the afternoon, with 26 3 to 5 year olds in the morning and 24 in the afternoon. One child came in just for the afternoon. Breakfast, snacks, lunch and tea are freshly prepared and provided for all the children who attend during these mealtimes. The nursery welcomes children for whom English is an additional language and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Overall administration of both nurseries is the responsibility of the owners, who both work full-time across both settings. The manager and her two deputies manage this setting, all work full-time and cover for each other's absences. These members of staff are not Montessori qualified but one of the owners has had in-depth training in the Montessori approach. Across the setting, a total of 28 staff members including the manager work directly with the children and 23 work full-time throughout the year. On the day of the second visit 27 members of staff were present all day, including one of the owners, the chef and the manager. There were eight members of staff working with the 3 to 5 year olds all day. Four of these staff members who work with the 3 to 5 year olds hold Montessori diplomas and one further member of staff has a Montessori classroom assistant qualification. Across the setting, six have degree qualifications and 22 hold a level 3 childcare qualification. Both of the owners hold Qualified Teacher Status and the manager has Early Years Professional Status and a BA Honours Degree in Early Childhood Education.

Summary

The nursery's characterful premises have been imaginatively adapted and offer the children a very well-appointed, exciting and homely environment in which to play and learn. Their environment, both indoors and outside, is prepared with their needs in mind. Although the outdoor areas are predominately covered with artificial surfaces, care is taken to give the children contact with nature.

Following the first accreditation visit, the management team has successfully guided and supported staff in working towards the recommended improvements, particularly by making the garden available to the children throughout the work cycle. There is clearly an intention to adhere to the Montessori principle of 'following the child', which is now also facilitated by the time made available for the children's independent learning. The adults are also developing opportunities for children to mix with each other more across the age groups, thereby providing them with further advantages that a Montessori education promotes. Informal verbal communication with parents is excellent and the recent introduction and use of a web-based record-keeping system has supported these links further.

The management of the team is excellent and a flexible staffing structure ensures that children can have their needs met. Staff members have a broad range of experience, and although only a few are Montessori qualified the management team

is committed to extending Montessori training to all members of staff across the whole setting. This is a caring and respectful learning environment in which the adults are willing to improve their practice for the benefit of the children.

The school provides an education which follows the principles of the Montessori approach and environment. The school has successfully addressed 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:

- the management team should consider rescheduling the timetabled group activities so that these do not interrupt the children's work cycle;
- opportunities for children to mix more freely across the age range could be managed by using an invitation system for them to visit other classrooms independently; and
- all staff should continue to work on improving the quality and depth of the children's records by including analytical evaluations.

Philosophy:

There is a clear intention at Elm Park Nursery to put the Montessori philosophy at the heart of its provision. By assessing its practice following the first accreditation visit, especially in relation to promoting the children's independent learning, the adults have strengthened their knowledge and understanding of the benefits of a Montessori education. This reflection has been led by the management team and the Montessori qualified practitioners.

The adults know the children in their care well and respond quickly to their ever-changing needs. The educational environment offers a varied curriculum. The children feel comfortable in this environment and engage well with the staff and their peers. They are encouraged to build on skills already learnt. Turn-taking, learning respect for each other and their environment, and enjoying the trust of the adults who work with them all enable the children to develop confidence and self-discipline.

Following the first visit, there is now more time for the children to self-select activities and work autonomously in order to follow their inner drives. Interruptions to their work cycles have been reduced. However, additional activities are still scheduled for most mornings and, while the children are given the choice as to whether to attend these or not, there is an expectation that they should. It is therefore recommended that these activities be rescheduled where possible so that children can experience an uninterrupted work cycle each day they attend. The children are now also able to choose when to work in the garden during the work cycle and they are able to move around their own floor and access all its different curriculum rooms. There is evidence of

staff members' intention to develop the invitation system which would encourage children to visit and work in other classes across the setting, to enjoy more freedom of movement and a greater mix across the age ranges.

There is a very informative website and parents' handbook which references the Montessori approach. Following the first visit the principles of the Montessori philosophy are now also referred to elsewhere in the setting's documentation and, while parents are not given formal opportunities to come into the nursery to learn specifically about Montessori practice, the web-based record-keeping system is used well by the staff to communicate this knowledge. The information offered to parents through this recently introduced system gives them greater understanding of how their children are learning through the Montessori approach, and how this approach links with the Early Years Foundation Stage Framework (EYFS).

The management team is very proactive and meets every month, at which time the aims, philosophy and policies of the setting are discussed as necessary. The management team of the nursery's sister setting joins some of these meetings, to share practice across the group. The leadership's enthusiastic support for the Montessori approach to education ensures that the team is now more able to 'follow the child'.

Learning and Development:

The balance between child-initiated activities and those delivered by adults to individuals or groups of children has been reviewed successfully following the first accreditation visit. On the day of the second visit the work cycle started as soon as the children arrived, between 08.00 and 09.00. Assembly and whole group circle times are not now scheduled to punctuate the work cycle and children are given the opportunity to visit the garden in small groups without disturbing their peers. The work cycle therefore has been extended to two and a half hours for most of the children. However, additional activities such as ballet are still scheduled into the morning routine across the week.

As the classrooms for the 3 to 5 year olds are on the first and second floors, children need to be escorted outside. The children's access to, and use of, the garden has been improved following the first visit. On the day of the second visit two small groups of children chose to be taken to the garden, one to prepare plants for planting and the other to go bird-watching, which linked with a national wildlife initiative. All the children were given the opportunity to go to the garden at the end of the morning if they chose to.

One very positive feature of the nursery is its willingness to adapt its provision for the benefit of the children. This was evident during the second visit in the way staff members supported children so that they could work at their own pace and do so independently. There is a consistent approach offered by the team to the children across the 3 to 5 year age range. Care is taken to ensure that there are always Montessori trained staff with them and these adults are experienced Montessori practitioners who understand what the Montessori method of education can offer the children. The learning materials are carefully chosen to suit the developmental needs of the children.

Staff members record and assess children's achievements using the web-based record-keeping system and use this to plan for each child's next steps. This new system has helped the whole team understand how the Montessori curriculum links with the requirements of the EYFS. The manager takes responsibility for monitoring the staff's record-keeping and assessments of children's progress. Three members of staff are designated Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Coordinators and take the lead in supporting inclusion in the setting. Makaton signing is well established within the setting.

Planning for the children is very rigorous. Each day is closely scheduled and the same topics are introduced across the age range. However, the teaching team has recently adopted a more open-ended approach to project work in its drive to offer the children greater opportunity to follow their individual interests. The broad curriculum, extensive resources and proactive staff ensure that all the children make progress in all areas of their learning and development.

Prepared Environment: resources and materials

This is an exceptionally well-resourced nursery. The building is light and airy and the classrooms are very spacious. The first floor's three separate classrooms are each set up with different curriculum areas for the 3 to 4 year olds. The main front room is a Montessori classroom with Montessori materials appropriate for this age group. A large room next to the Montessori room is used for construction, role-play and other creative activities; it also has a book corner and snack table. A small room at the back of the building is used for project work; it has a painting easel and water tray as well language and maths materials. The children on this floor are free to move between these rooms in following their own interests. The second floor, for the 4 to 5 year olds, has one room with Montessori resources and a nature table, and another room with role-play resources, a book corner, computer, and construction activities.

All these rooms have low shelving and the position of the tables and chairs ensures that the children can access all the materials independently and that they have the space to choose where to work. The materials on the shelves are clean and complete and both the children and adults take very good care of the learning environment. An extensive range of materials for their current project 'birds' was available on the day of the second accreditation visit and the children were able to listen to bird song and make bird feeders.

Following the first visit, all meals are now served to each of these age groups in their role-play rooms, which allows their Montessori provision to be continuously available. They now also have the necessary resources to wash up their crockery after breakfast.

The beautiful shady garden has been very imaginatively equipped with an excellent range of resources to meet the needs of all the children. It is divided into three areas which the 3 to 5 year olds can use during both the morning and afternoon. The first is mainly used for water play and ride-on toys, with a 'road' marked out on the surface. The middle area has a table and chairs along with construction materials. While the surfaces in these areas are artificial, there are established shrubs and trees, as well as planters,

which give the garden a very natural feel. The third area has a wood-chip surface on which is set large climbing apparatus. There is also a large playhouse and two storage sheds along with two other garden buildings that house a staff room and an office. All the children are very well engaged outdoors and there are plenty of resources here for them to use. This facility offers outstanding provision for these urban-dwelling children.

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

Throughout the day the children are given opportunities to develop their skills and independence, and adults promote these through the provision of resources and support as required. When the children arrive in the morning they can choose what they have for breakfast, they help themselves to cereal and toast and clear up afterwards. Following a suggestion from the first accreditation visit, the organisation of the mealtime routines is now an outstanding feature of this day nursery. For example, the children help set the tables, choose where to sit and with whom, and help themselves to their lunch, guided by an attentive adult. They pass the food around to their friends as well as pour their own drinks, and each table starts eating together. This excellent practice ensures that the children are trusted to make their own choices and do not have to wait too long to start eating. All children are free to eat at their own pace and can request more food if they are still hungry. A member of staff sits at each table and eats with the children in order to guide the conversation and encourage good eating habits and table manners. At the end of lunch the children clear their plates and wipe the surfaces, which gives them a sense of responsibility. The adults are also adept at offering the children choices about mealtimes as, for example, when they went out to the garden to have a picnic tea on the day of the first visit, which the children thoroughly enjoyed.

Offering the children a longer daily work cycle and more spontaneous access to the garden has greatly benefitted them; they now make more decisions independently and thereby gain in confidence, self-reliance and initiative. Further developing the use of an effective invitation system to visit other age groups would allow the children to mix more freely together, independently from the adults.

Through their use of the web-based record-keeping system the parents can see for themselves how independence is supported in the nursery. By including more information in the literature, as well as providing Montessori information sessions for the parents, the setting could demonstrate further the importance of encouraging independence in the home as well as at nursery.

Support and respect for each other's cultures is very evident in this nursery and staff members model respectful behaviour very well. Project themes and the staff's knowledge and skills all contribute to children's growing understanding of equality and diversity.

The children are encouraged to care for the plants and to help recycle waste, giving them further opportunities to learn respect for the environment and for living things. To enhance their appreciation of nature the children have gardening lessons and plant

potatoes, basil, tomatoes and chives. Returning resources to their set places and cleaning up after their activities demonstrates children's respect for their learning environment, and respect for their peers is promoted well, such as through role-play.

Montessori Practice: links with parents, including reports and records

A significant transition has recently taken place as the team moved from a paper recording system, which did not include any reference to Montessori, to the securely managed web-based system that fully documents the Montessori curriculum. It is notable that staff members who have less knowledge of Montessori practice are using this new system enthusiastically. This is a credit to the management team and Montessori lead practitioners as it reflects the support they are offering the whole team. Now that all members of staff are more adept at using this new system, developing their analytical evaluations would further add to their skills in recording and assessing children's progress. The system has given parents a greater opportunity to share information with the team and to follow their own child's progress.

The setting operates a very effective key person system with that named person being responsible for the record-keeping and welfare of their children. There is also a 'key buddy' system in place, which ensures that each child always has an allocated adult present. The regularity of verbal communication with parents is one of the outstanding features of this nursery and the parents appreciate the time that is given to them at the beginning and end of each day. This enables staff members to build a strong relationship with the child's family. The staff and parents value their partnership as it helps them both build a holistic picture of the child's learning and development. The key person writes a report on the child for their parents at least once a year and these are also used as a transition document when the child moves between the age groups or leaves the setting. These are compiled under the EYFS's areas of learning and development and are comprehensive.

Individual meetings with parents are offered three times a year. Comprehensive newsletters are produced regularly for parents and the noticeboards in the reception hall are informative. Emails and website updates are also used to keep parents informed and include information on the Montessori approach and children's schemas. The parents report that they are delighted with the high quality of service offered to them.

Staff: qualifications, deployment, and performance management

The manager has overall responsibility for managing the nursery on a daily basis and is well supported by the owners and deputy managers. She recognises her staff's individual skills and delegates the running of the 3 to 5 age range classes to the room leaders who are Montessori trained.

Staff members benefit from clear job descriptions, which make reference to Montessori philosophy, and a supportive induction process. Written observations, made by both management and peers, are fed into the annual appraisals and supervision procedure,

overseen by management team members. These all provide informative and comprehensive opportunities for self-evaluation. Both established and new staff members feel very well supported. They know what is expected of them as their roles are well defined and the management team monitors performance well. Formal minuted meetings are held regularly for management, and for the whole team. Opportunities for continuing professional development are well established and, following a suggestion made at the first accreditation visit, training in the Montessori approach is now compulsory for all staff across the whole setting. A variety of other courses are provided either in-house or externally.

This is a charming nursery, set in exceptional premises. The staff demonstrates a strong commitment to making changes to practice and routines for the benefit of the children, such as by following the recommendations made during this accreditation. With the help of the qualified Montessori practitioners, the management team is guiding and supporting all staff members to continue to enhance the setting's Montessori practice.

Name of Assessor: Charlotte White

Date report submitted: First visit – 27 June 2017

Second visit – 12 January 2018