

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.

The Little Learners Montessori Nursery School

The Hall, 10 Oaklands Gate, Northwood HA6 3AA

Date of first accreditation visit: 6 October 2017

Date of second accreditation visit: 24 January 2018

This accreditation is valid until June 2022

This accreditation report relates to the provision for children aged 6 months to 5 years

Description of the nursery school:

The Little Learners Montessori Nursery School, Northwood, is located in a residential area of the London Borough of Hillingdon. It is situated in a two storey building of which it has sole use. Both floors have a large open-plan classroom, with separate toilet facilities on each floor and a staff room/kitchen on the ground floor. It has a courtyard outside, which is partly covered by a fixed shelter. All the children share the courtyard, while those aged 6 months to 2 years have the room on the first floor and the 2 to 5 year olds are on the ground floor.

The setting is open five days a week for 48 weeks per year. Morning sessions run

between 08.00 and 13.00, and afternoon sessions 13.00 to 18.00. Children can attend morning, afternoon or all day sessions, to suit the needs of each family, with the majority attending 08.00 to 18.00. They are provided with snacks and a hot meal at lunch time. A breakfast club runs from 07.30; however, this report does not include assessment of the club.

The setting accommodates a maximum of 40 children each session. There are currently 44 children on roll, all between 6 months and 5 years of age. At the second accreditation visit 12 staff members attended, with 35 children in the morning and 31 in the afternoon. Six members of staff stayed with the under 2 year olds, of whom there were 13 in the morning and ten in the afternoon. The nursery school supports children with special educational needs and/or disabilities, and those for whom English is an additional language. It receives support from the local authority's early years team.

This privately owned nursery school opened in 2014 and is one of five in the same ownership. It employs 13 staff members, including a manager, all of whom work full-time and directly with the children. Three members of staff have Montessori qualifications. The proprietors form the nursery group's higher management team and deliver staff training, monitoring and support for the setting's staff but do not work here full-time.

Summary

The Little Learners Montessori Nursery School, Northwood, offers excellent Montessori provision. Its calm, harmonious learning environment enables the children to concentrate as they use the wide range of resources. The philosophy of the Montessori approach is well understood due to thorough staff training, and the team implements it in a highly effective way. All the adults are welcoming and respectful. They understand that children learn independence through being given freedom to explore in this stimulating prepared environment, to choose the resources they wish to use, and to learn at their own pace. The adults make the learning enjoyable, exciting and challenging to provide an excellent foundation for the children. The children show respect towards each other and high achievement in their progress.

The team uses a web-based system efficiently for recording assessment and keeping parents well informed of their child's progress. The management team is highly responsive to parent feedback and evaluates practice effectively. The management and staff are fully committed to the MEAB accreditation process as a means to continue to offer high quality education and care for the children. Following the first accreditation visit they have extended the work cycle to three hours or longer in both daily sessions, which has benefitted the children.

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:

- the management's records on staff qualifications and deployment should be kept up-to-date and accessible; and
- the planning and assessment should include sufficient detail on the development of the physical skills of the children over 2 years old.

Philosophy:

The Little Learners Montessori Nursery School, Northwood, follows closely the principles of the Montessori philosophy. The children in each room are given freedom to choose their activities, with guidance from staff, which allows them to follow their own interests and promotes their enthusiasm for learning. The adults fully support them to work towards their unique potential and enable them to learn at their own pace. There are high levels of trust between the adults and the children. This creates a calm, quiet and relaxing environment for the children and helps them to develop initiative and self-discipline. The children enjoy a mixed age range within their classroom. In the courtyard both age ranges mix freely together and learn from each other throughout the day, as small groups of the younger children are taken out and so share access to this learning environment with the older children.

All the adults have a very good understanding of how to implement Montessori principles. Their role is to prepare an environment that is welcoming and stimulating, where children feel comfortable to engage in play with their peers and with staff. They provide a wide range of activities that suits the needs of all the children. The setting now ensures that a full work cycle is offered to all the children daily. The Montessori philosophy is stated on the nursery school's website and in its recently updated prospectus. The quality of Montessori practice is reviewed and evaluated regularly by both the nursery's management and higher management teams.

Learning and Development:

All the Montessori areas of learning are well covered and the children enjoy a wide range of resources, both indoors and outside. Excellent use is made of the outside area, as the older children have access to it at all times during the sessions and the younger ones join them in small groups. Each classroom has on display a written statement of classroom procedures, daily routines and planning. Adults' roles are clearly defined to provide for children's wellbeing and the duties of staff are displayed in writing. There is an effective key person system and staff deployment helps ensure that the adults are available to support the children when they need guidance. The organisation of the daily routine is excellent, the children are carefully supervised and staff plan presentations of resources to facilitate progress in all children's learning. The adults are excellent role models and children also learn successfully from each other. The balance between adult-led and child-initiated activity is exceptionally good as staff follow the interests of

each child and provide resources according to their individual needs.

Children mostly arrive at 08.00 and some have breakfast, which remains available in the classrooms until 09.00, while others commence their work cycle, choosing activities indoors or outside. Following a recommendation made at the first accreditation visit, the work cycle can now start at 08.00. It lasts until between 11.20 and 11.30, when group activities are offered to all the children. These include yoga on Wednesdays, sports on Thursdays, music and dance on Tuesdays and Fridays, and story-telling on Mondays. An external instructor provides the sports activities on Thursdays, the other groups are offered by members of staff. Children who do not wish to participate have continued access to many of the resources to freely choose from. After lunch, the work cycle runs from 13:00 until 17.00 for those who do not need to sleep in the afternoon. The daily routines of those under 2 years of age are well supported; they have individual sleeping and feeding times. After lunch some of the children from the ground floor room go for a sleep in the first floor room. The setting has the capacity to meet all the children's developmental needs, including those with additional needs.

Planning is based on children's interests, with individual planning for each child following the Montessori curriculum. This is drawn up by the key person. In addition, weekly plans are drawn up by the team for each room. These cover both the Montessori curriculum and the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) areas of learning and development. Long and short term planning is on display in both rooms.

Staff members observe and record by means of photographs the activities in which children engage. These are stored in the child's digital record on the secure web-based system and are discussed and linked to the EYFS areas by the key person and the manager. Overall assessment of the child's progress is made by the manager and uploaded to this securely managed system for the child's parents to view. A separate, high-quality detailed and dated record is kept by the key person to monitor the child's progress with the Montessori areas of learning. When photographs are taken that show evidence of a child's progress with Montessori materials this evidence is also linked into the child's EYFS digital record. The web-based system is also used to evaluate the overall effectiveness of the learning and development provision by the higher management team. It is recommended that staff members include more detail in their assessment of, and planning for, the development of physical skills for those over 2 years old.

Prepared Environment: resources and materials

The organisation of this setting's learning environment is outstanding. All resources are easily accessible and are set out in order by the Montessori areas of learning. The range of general early years resources and Montessori materials is very good, both indoors and outside. The materials are in very good condition, ready for use, complete and clean. The quantity of resources is plentiful for the number of children attending and they are appropriate to meet their developmental needs. The layout of the rooms provides the children with ample space to use the materials and move around freely.

The room for the under 2 year olds has distinct areas for sleeping and for mealtimes. Its layout enables these children to move with ease from one activity to another according to their interests as they become increasingly mobile. Indoors, children have access to the Montessori areas of learning, art and craft, a book corner, snack and washing up areas in each room.

Outdoors, children enjoy using the mud kitchen, water and sand trays, musical instruments, tricycles and a 'botanic garden' where they can look at books, chat and enjoy the natural surroundings. All staff members prepare and maintain the environment very well through daily checks indoors and out. Children participate in the maintenance of their learning environment by helping to check the shelves at the end of the work cycle, to ensure that the materials are back in their correct places.

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

Children's independence is nurtured throughout the work cycles, indoors and outside. Staff members trust the children to use the resources spontaneously. They give them sufficient time to take off their shoes and put their slippers on; they encourage them to put on their own coats and to practice fastenings by using the Montessori dressing frames. Children learn how to look after the environment and to tidy up after themselves. Staff members also promote the children's independence during meals, which are all served in the children's own rooms, including breakfast and tea. Those under 2 years have healthy snacks available for them throughout the sessions. Those over that age are encouraged to choose a fruit for snack, wash it, cut it, and wash their dishes afterwards. Children who are able to serve themselves at lunch time do so.

All adults respect the children, each other and the materials, and this leads to a harmonious atmosphere. Learning respect for other cultures is promoted and staff members demonstrate great patience in working to understand the needs of each child and their family. They also promote the children's respect for self and others through reinforcing the setting's ground rules that encourage children to resolve issues and develop self-discipline. Children enjoy the freedom to choose to work individually or in different-sized groups and to complete their cycles of activity at their own pace. Staff skillfully redirect children to new activities and encourage positive social interaction. The setting also ably promotes the children's independence at home, for example during Montessori workshops offered to parents.

Montessori Practice: links with parents, including reports and records

The partnership with parents is excellent. The nursery offers flexibility regarding children's attendance to suit each family's needs. The key person is responsible for settling the child in and continues to liaise closely with their parents. Communication with parents is highly effective and those with children under 2 years old receive daily written information regarding their wellbeing and care routines. Every week all parents receive a written update about their child's progress and have an opportunity to

comment and add their observations. Parents are also involved in the assessment and recording of their child's learning and progress during parent/key person meetings held at regular intervals through the year. They are also invited to parent evenings. Furthermore, they can contribute to their child's mandatory two year old progress check. The management team holds Montessori workshops for the parents to learn about the Montessori approach and the importance of each area of learning.

Parents receive a monthly electronic newsletter, a written prospectus which explains the Montessori approach, and have access to the informative website and a Facebook page. Events to involve parents and carers include concerts in the winter and summer, coffee and tea evenings, sports days and organised trips. Parents are also encouraged to participate in activities at the setting, such as coming in to talk to the children about their occupations. Parents receive written reports and, when the children leave, the next school receives a transition report as well as an invitation to visit the children whilst still at nursery. Parents are very happy with all aspects of the setting and appreciate the high quality of the provision.

Staff: qualifications, deployment, and performance management

This setting has a thriving team ethos. It is led by the professional higher management team that is supported by the structured nursery school management team, which includes the manager, her deputy and an assistant manager. It is recommended that the nursery's management team keeps information on staff qualifications and deployment up-to-date and easily accessible.

Adult responsibilities are set out clearly in job descriptions, which make reference to the Montessori approach. Daily routines and checks are displayed. The higher management team updates policies and procedures regularly and actively oversees their implementation. Staff members receive regular Montessori training during Saturday workshops run by the higher management team to ensure that this approach is understood and embedded in practice. Staff members also receive other necessary training such as in First Aid. A full development plan is in place and covers all aspects of the setting's practice and staff members' professional development.

The higher management team members are well qualified in early years education; one of the three has a Montessori diploma and the other two have Early Years Professional Status. Of the 13 staff members who work directly with the children, seven have early years qualifications. Three have Montessori diplomas, two have degrees and the others' early years qualifications range from NVQ Level 2 to Level 4. Four members of staff are working towards NVQ Level 3 and two are working towards Level 2. The team working with the under 2 year olds has the training and experience to fully meet the needs of these children.

A robust induction system is in place and it is documented. Staff meetings are recorded and all have follow-up action plans. Room meetings take place every two weeks and whole staff meetings at monthly intervals. The manager is responsible for conducting supervision meetings with the setting's staff every six weeks and their annual appraisals.

All the staff and the manager carry out peer observations every six weeks. All are encouraged to be reflective practitioners and to fully commit to their own professional development. The team work is excellent and the adults evidently enjoy working with the children; they demonstrate enthusiasm for and commitment to Montessori practices.

Name of Assessor: Anne McConway

Date report submitted: First visit – 10 October 2017

Second visit – 29 January 2018