



# **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 Learners Montessori School**

St. Helen's Church, St. Helen's Road, Solihull B91 2BJ

Date of previous MEAB accreditation: November 2012

Date of first re-accreditation visit: 18 January 2016

Date of second re-accreditation visit: 29 April 2016

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

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

Little Learners Montessori School was established in 1995. It is situated in a large church hall in a quiet residential area, approximately one mile from Solihull town centre. A full-height partition divides the hall to create a large classroom and a smaller room, which is used mainly for nature study, art activities and role-play. There is also a small kitchen, storeroom, hallway and cloakroom facilities. The outside area comprises a large car park and a partly-fenced grass area with a raised bed, and a path leading to adjacent public woodland. There is also a shed, used to store the school's outdoor play equipment which includes a sandpit, slide and gardening equipment.

The school is open weekdays during term-time from 08.30 to 15.15 and offers a morning session from 08.30 to 12.00 and an afternoon session from 12.00 to 15.15. Children who stay for both sessions bring a packed lunch and they eat with the children who arrive just for the afternoon session. Outside these hours other groups use the hall so the school's equipment is packed away to accommodate them. There are currently 39 children on roll and the maximum number of children attending any session is 24. On the day of the second visit there were 21 children attending the morning session, six of whom were under 3 years old, and 11 children stayed for the afternoon session, three



of whom were under 3 years old.

There are six members of staff, including the owner/head teacher. All have relevant childcare qualifications and three are Montessori qualified. Half the team work full time, including the head and deputy. On the day of the second visit five staff were present in the morning and three in the afternoon.

## Summary

The calm, unhurried atmosphere at Little Learners Montessori School gives children a gentle introduction to nursery education. The parents appreciate this, and some travel over 30 miles to bring their children to the school. When the children arrive they choose what they would like to do and they feel secure that the adults are there to support them. The staff team are good role models for the children – they are respectful of them and of each other.

Following recommendations made during the last MEAB accreditation the period for which snack is available has been extended and the teachers have continued to add written evidence of children's interests and of spontaneous observations to children's Learning Journeys. Since the first re-accreditation visit staff have re-organised the layout of the larger room, removing some of the older materials and extending the range of activities for everyday living. They have also worked hard to make the book corners more comfortable for children who need to rest.

***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 point for further development:***

- to continue with the review of the prepared environment to ensure that the needs of all the children are fulfilled, giving particular consideration to the youngest members of the class.

## Philosophy:

The school's aim, which is to "provide a high quality of early childhood education that upholds the principles and practices of the Montessori philosophy" is set out clearly on the website and in the parent handbook. New parents are given a copy of 'Reach' – a brochure that explains the Montessori philosophy – and they are invited to an 'Introduction to Montessori' evening. The head teacher provides strong leadership and training so that staff members understand their role in achieving the school's aim and



are able to plan activities which meet the needs of each child. Children's self-initiated learning and self-discipline are fully supported. This is achieved through on-going discussion within the staff team in addition to a formal termly meeting which covers Montessori principles and a review of the school's aim and policies.

### **Learning and Development:**

The morning work cycle starts at 08.30 when most children arrive and continues for 3½ hours, the afternoon work cycle is slightly shorter. This daily routine gives every child ample time to explore the activities, all of which are easily accessible. The larger room is the main classroom and primarily contains Montessori materials, a snack table and a book corner. Children are also able to access the smaller room whenever they wish – this too contains a book corner as well as role-play and creative areas. On the day of the first re-accreditation visit the role-play area had been arranged as a café, with an assortment of fruit and vegetables, and utensils such as graters and peelers. The children enjoyed touching and smelling the food items, mixing them together and serving them to each other. Posters of fruit and vegetables encouraged children to talk to each other about their favourite foods. On the day of the second visit there was also a gardening and nature corner in this smaller room and the children were excited about the caterpillars which they understood were going to change into butterflies. A new science area has also been added, giving the children opportunities to explore the properties of magnetism, floating and sinking and air. One child who was shaking an oil and water mixture stated "I'm doing an experiment".

There is no outside area accessible directly from the classroom but the children can ask to go outside with an adult at any time during the work cycles. On the day of the second visit children were using the mud kitchen, digging for worms in the gardening area, painting and playing in the sand tray. There were also opportunities for climbing and sliding. On occasions when the outside area is unusable due to extreme weather, the children are offered the opportunity to go for escorted walks.

Termly planning of themed and craft activities is carried out by the whole staff team and is displayed both on the classroom noticeboard and on the parent's noticeboard in the hallway. When a child joins the school a baseline assessment form is completed and this is the starting point for individual planning. As well as registration records, each child has a Learning Journey file in which staff's written observations and photographs taken of the child are kept in chronological order. The observations are cross-referenced to the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) curriculum and to a chart of the Characteristics of Effective Learning. In addition, each child has Montessori Activities sheets which cover their progress with the Montessori areas of learning. These sheets are updated daily by the staff member working in each area. The child's key person uses all of this information, together with their knowledge of the child's interests, to prepare a weekly plan for each of their key children. Assessment of children's learning is very good and staff members know their key children well. In order to gain as wide a picture of each child as possible there is also a termly programme of longer



observations of each child, which are undertaken by staff other than the child's key person.

Mandatory progress checks for two year olds are completed in close collaboration with the child's parents. When children with special education needs and/or disabilities attend the school they are supported by the head who is the setting's Special Educational Needs Coordinator; she also assists children for whom English is an additional language and ensures that staff receive any necessary training and contact with external agencies.

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

The main classroom is a large and bright space that is arranged according to the Montessori areas of learning. The variety and quantity of the Montessori materials are appropriate for the developmental stages of the children attending the school. The non-Montessori materials available are of high quality. Since the first re-accreditation visit staff team have worked really well to enhance the learning environment, and some of the older pieces of non-Montessori equipment have been removed to make way for a wider range of activities for everyday living. The creative area in the smaller classroom is well stocked and children have easy access to craft and painting materials. The role-play area has a good selection of props and dressing-up clothes and, since the first visit, several mirrors have been added to extend the children's enjoyment of this area. Both rooms have attractive book corners with baskets of books and small beanbags, which make these areas comfortable for the children and provide a rest area for those who need to sleep.

Outside, the school has the use of a grass area which is surrounded by a temporary fence when in use by the children. There is a raised bed used for digging and growing flowers and vegetables and children are able to fill watering cans from a nearby tap. Items such as a slide and sandpit are brought out from the shed depending on the weather. On the day of the second visit the children enjoyed playing with the new mud kitchen which had been built by one of the parents. They talked about the ingredients they would need for a pretend pasta dish and investigated what happened when the 'pasta' became wet.

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

The development of independence is very well supported at Little Learners Montessori School. Some of the older 2 year olds display high levels of independence; they work alongside the older children and learn from them. On arrival at the beginning of the session, children find their own name cards on the registration board and 'sign' themselves in. They are then free to choose which room they would prefer to be in and to choose their own activities, which they use for as long as they like.



During the re-accreditation visits the atmosphere was very calm, with children working alone or in small groups. Floor mats are available for children who prefer to work on the floor. The children clean up after themselves, they put away their work when they have finished with it and confidently use a brush and dustpan or mop and bucket, reminding others to do so too. Children help themselves from the snack table, they pour their own drinks and confidently carry plates and cups to where they wish to sit. They clear up their dishes and wash them at a small sink. At lunchtime children help themselves to a tray and lay out their lunch and cutlery, and again, wash their own dishes afterwards. When getting ready to go outside children are encouraged to put on their boots and outdoor clothes by themselves. The children are trusted to use utensils such as a safety peeler and a grater and they handle these with care. They understand the ground-rules of the classroom and are respectful of each other and of the adults, who are good role models. Grace and courtesy lessons also help children to understand what is expected of them.

At the beginning of each term parents are invited to a Montessori information evening where they are given ideas about how to help their child's independence at home. There is also an active private Facebook page so that parents can be kept up to date about the new skills their children are learning; this is regularly monitored by the head and the rest of the team. Each child's Learning Journey is sent home every half term and end of term in order that parents can see new observations and photographs. Staff members also tell parents what their children have achieved when they collect them at the end of the session. The adults at Little Learners Montessori School have high expectations of the children and they do everything possible to help them to develop independence.

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

New children joining the school are not allocated to a key person until a couple of weeks after they join, so that any preferences they have about which adult to go to can be taken into account. Other than key persons being responsible for their key children no other method of grouping is used and children are free to work with whom and wherever they wish. Although key persons are responsible for planning their key children's next learning steps, all members of staff contribute to recorded observations of every child.

The adults constantly monitor the staff:child ratio in each room to ensure that these remain appropriate. A timetable displayed on the classroom noticeboard shows allocated daily duties for each staff member, such as greeting children at the door in the morning or being responsible for one of the areas of Montessori learning materials. The team reviews policies and procedures regularly and a copy of these is kept at the school for daily reference.

When enrolling their child at the school parents are asked about any special dietary needs their child may have and information about these is displayed in the kitchen area



so that all staff can check it daily. Lunch is a very sociable occasion during which children talk to each other and to the adults who are on hand to help them. Children who need to rest can do so in the book corners. The recent addition of more soft items has made these areas more comfortable. Classroom management in the school is very good; however, the head and her team should review the arrangement and activities in the classrooms to ensure that the needs of the youngest children are being met, as the school has recently started to enroll children who have just turned 2 years old.

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

Parents report that they chose to send their children to Little Learners Montessori School because of its excellent reputation. They are very pleased with the information they have been given about Montessori and feel that the parent evenings held by the school are very helpful. They are asked to provide written feedback about these events to enable staff to ensure that they continue to meet their needs.

Children's Learning Journeys are sent home regularly and parents are invited to add their own comments about their children's learning and interests. Parents have consultations at the end of every term with their child's key person to discuss their progress, although daily dialogue also takes place. In addition, parents are invited into the school shortly after their child has started so that they can get to know the child's key person and can also discreetly observe their child during a session.

When children are due to leave, a transition report is prepared for the next school and parents are also invited to discuss this with their child's key person. Newsletters and the parent noticeboard in the hallway give parents information about their child's key person, about topics for the term and information about Montessori and the EYFS. Further information about Montessori education and the EYFS is also available for them on the school's Facebook page. Links with parents are strong.

### **Staffing:**

The head works full time and holds a Montessori qualification in addition to an early years' degree, Early Years Professional Status and a foundation degree in Leadership and Management. The deputy head also works full time and holds a relevant childcare qualification. Of the remaining four staff, one works full time and holds a degree in early years, and three work part time including two who are Montessori qualified. There is a low turnover of staff at Little Learners Montessori School.

Training records are kept for all staff and the head works with each member of the team to assess training needs and plan for their continued professional development, using mainly local authority and Montessori training providers. All staff are required to hold food hygiene and first aid qualifications. Thorough induction procedures are in place for all new staff and also for students working at the school. These ensure that all



adults working with the children have a good understanding of the school's policies and procedures and of its Montessori approach. The head holds annual staff appraisals and the deputy head undertakes termly supervision meetings with all staff. As the team all work closely together, informal discussions take place daily with regard to the learning environment and children's needs. Formal documented staff meetings are held every term.

All staff members working at Little Learners Montessori School have a very good understanding of Montessori principles and show a strong commitment to using these to ensure that the children in their care receive the best possible early years education.

Name of Assessor: Susie Norman

Date report submitted: First visit – 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2016

Second visit – 30<sup>th</sup> April 2016