

## **Montessori Evaluation and Accreditation Board** **School Accreditation**

This report is a supplement to the setting's previous MEAB Accreditation Final Report, which is published in conjunction with this report.

**This report was prepared following, and is based on, two accreditation visits made on behalf of the Montessori Evaluation and Accreditation Board.** It considers how far the setting follows relevant criteria in "The Guide to the EYFS in Montessori Settings" (2012/14). During the second visit the progress made with the recommendations set out in the report from the first visit was assessed and any further findings made during the second visit were considered.

The report does not address the standards and quality issues that are assessed by the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted), which reports separately. Also the report does not provide any assessment of financial aspects of the setting.

Receiving accreditation carries the expectation that the setting will continue to work on the issues highlighted in this report and will remain committed to the ongoing development of its practice. Furthermore, that it 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.

### **Jelly Beans Montessori Nursery**

St. Pius X Catholic Church, Southend Road, Hockley, Essex SS4 1RF

Date of previous MEAB accreditation: November 2013

This accreditation is valid until June 2022.

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

#### **Description of the nursery:**

Jelly Beans Montessori Nursery is a year round Montessori setting for children aged from birth to 5 years. This is the longest established of three settings founded by the director – it opened in 2004 and moved to its current premises in a church hall in 2012. The other two settings have opened since the previous MEAB accreditation.

The director, who has many years' experience, holds a Montessori international diploma and an early years degree. She works full-time, sharing her time between the three settings. Due to recent staffing changes, the director has been spending more time at this setting in order to support the nursery manager, who is completing a Montessori qualification to add to her early years qualification. There are five other full-time staff, who also hold early years qualifications. One further staff member, who shares her time between this setting and one of the other settings in the group, is undergoing Montessori

training. There are six part-time staff, of whom four hold childcare qualifications and one has Qualified Teacher Status.

During opening hours, the nursery has sole use of two large inter-connecting rooms, toilet facilities and a kitchen/office. The staff pack all the furniture and materials away on Friday afternoons so that the rooms are free for use by the church's congregation. Children aged between 2 and 5 years are based in the smaller of the two rooms (St. Nicholas), which is led by the nursery manager and the director. Children under 2 years old are based in the larger room (Santa Maria), which is led by a full-time staff member who holds an early years qualification. The Santa Maria room is divided into two areas, creating a sleeping, changing and playing area for the younger babies and a spacious area for the babies who are walking. Older children from the St. Nicholas room who need to rest are also able to do so in this room. Both rooms have direct access to a large outdoor space which comprises a decking area, an enclosed grassed garden with a mature tree and a further secure lawned area, which is used for the nursery's 'Woodland' sessions.

Since the first reaccreditation visit the nursery's opening hours have changed from 07.30 – 18.00 to 07.00 – 18.30, in response to parent requests. Children may attend for morning or afternoon sessions, or for a full day. Children bring packed lunches from home and families are invited to contribute to snack. Dinner is provided by the nursery. On the morning of the second visit, there were 17 children aged between 2 and 5 years old with four staff in the St. Nicholas room, and in the afternoon there were nine children with three staff members. Eleven children under 2 years old were present with four staff for the morning session in the Santa Maria room, and nine children with three staff were present in the afternoon. A maximum of 35 children attend the setting at any time and there are 74 children on roll. Children with special educational needs and/or disabilities are supported by the director, who is a trained Special Educational Needs Coordinator.

## Summary

Children at Jelly Beans Montessori Nursery are given many valuable learning opportunities and they show high levels of independence. The nursery has strong roots in the local community. The director is on the Board of Governors of a local primary school and parents cite this strong link as one of the reasons why children transition easily to school. Parents also speak highly of how well they are kept informed of their child's progress. The adults at Jelly Beans Montessori Nursery are very kind to, and very respectful of, the children – there is genuine warmth in how they interact with the children and they obviously know them exceptionally well, which is a real strength of the nursery. The staff in the Santa Maria room are extremely patient and gentle with these younger children – they make sure that the pace is unhurried and that the children are given as much time as necessary to complete their activities.

Following the previous MEAB accreditation, one of the recommendations related to the use of the digital record-keeping system. The director has recently introduced an

extremely comprehensive induction manual, which includes guidance for staff on the use of the electronic tablets. A second recommendation related to the layout of the materials in the St. Nicholas room, because children did not appear to be engaging with the indoor activities. Following the first reaccreditation visit, a recommendation was again made regarding the layout of materials in the St. Nicholas room, as well as the accessibility and variety of activities in the Santa Maria room. On the second visit, children from the St. Nicholas room were observed using the indoor and outdoor environments with equal enthusiasm, and changes made for the children in the Santa Maria room now give them easier access to a wider range of developmentally appropriate activities. This commitment to reviewing and improving provision is to be commended.

The director is committed to providing high quality Montessori education, and, despite recent staff changes, she remains proactive in establishing an understanding of Montessori principles among her staff. The director and the nursery manager use the staff induction manual daily to support the adults in learning about Montessori and, during the second visit, greater consistency was observed in how adults guide and manage children's behaviour. It is planned that several members of staff will shortly undertake Montessori training.

***The setting provides an education which follows the principles of the Montessori approach and environment. The setting 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:***

- continue to support staff with Montessori training in order to establish and maintain a strong base of Montessori knowledge and skill;
- establish an ongoing programme of replacement and repair of Montessori materials, and
- continue to enhance opportunities for children to develop independence in the Santa Maria room.

**An Action Plan has been drawn up with, and retained by, the setting to address these recommendations.**

#### **Philosophy:**

The director has a clear understanding of Montessori philosophy and a strong vision of how she would like this to be used to provide an outstanding learning environment for the children in the nursery. She is currently supporting the nursery manager, who is undertaking Montessori training, in leading the St. Nicholas room. The director and the nursery manager make good use of the staff induction manual to ensure that the adults take account of Montessori principles in the running of both rooms, and in supporting

children's independence.

During the second reaccreditation visit the morning work cycle in the Saint Nicholas room stretched from the time that children arrived until after lunch. They were free to choose any activity at any time, to choose when they would like to have snack and whether they would like to have lunch indoors or outdoors. Children in the Santa Maria room were also able to follow their own interests throughout the morning and afternoon sessions. Some staff who have been with the nursery for several years can talk confidently about some aspects of Montessori philosophy and, following the first visit, several staff members have applied to undertake Montessori training. The director should continue to actively support staff with Montessori training. The mission statement and aims for the nursery are displayed in the classrooms and in the reception area, although not on the nursery's website.

### **Learning and Development:**

The processes of planning and assessment of children's learning are very good. Following changes to leadership of both rooms between the first and second accreditation visits, the director has undertaken an audit of each child's learning record. Consequently, she has a thorough understanding of their developmental stage and is able to help their key person with short-term planning using the nursery's secure online learning journal. Based on the child's interests, the adult selects a Montessori activity that they feel will extend the child's learning and then looks for an opportunity to present this activity to the child. This is documented using photographs and a written observation. This information is then used to plan children's next steps, and the online system links the information to the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) areas of learning and development. Each child also has a paper 'Work Book' in which they can save pieces of work.

Parents can easily access their child's learning journal and can contribute their own observations and photographs, as well as get ideas on how to support their child's interests at home. Medium term planning covers art activities and topics in which the children have shown interest. Long term planning such as for block play, water play and sand play (indoors and outside) is carried out by each room's team. Both long and medium planning are linked to the EYFS areas and are displayed on the rooms' walls. Additional activities such as yoga, mindfulness, dancing and rhyming are offered each week and children may choose whether to join these sessions. 'Woodland' outdoor learning sessions are held on the nursery's enclosed lawn area, these are held any time the children request them. Children in the Santa Maria room are able to follow their own natural rhythms - they sleep, eat and play when they wish, with support from the adults who understand the needs of these young children.

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

Children are grouped by age. In the St. Nicholas room, the activities are arranged according to the Montessori areas of learning and children are able to freely access the

learning materials. Following a recommendation made during the first reaccreditation visit, the layout and content of the classroom have been reviewed to ensure that children's learning opportunities and experiences are as wide as possible. Furthermore, subsequent to the recent change of room leadership, the director has undertaken a full and productive audit of the Montessori materials. To aid the timely replacement of Montessori materials, the director should consider establishing a programme which also involves staff in ensuring that materials are kept complete and in good repair.

In the Santa Maria room, many of the resources were previously stored in deep baskets, which made it difficult for the babies to see them. Additionally, some of the baskets were over-crowded, impeding the opportunity for the children to remove items independently. Following a recommendation made during the first visit, the director and the manager have carried out a review of the layout and the content of this room too and, as a consequence, the activities for babies are now presented in a more accessible and ordered manner. There is a wider range of activities and, on the second visit, the babies were observed to be more engaged and more independent.

The outside area offers good quality learning opportunities, which were well supported by the staff member who was on outdoor duty on the morning of the second visit. Activities which particularly interested the children in the garden included bug hunting, a dinosaur habitat and construction activities.

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

The children at Jelly Beans Montessori Nursery have many excellent opportunities to develop their independence. In the St. Nicholas room they help to prepare snack and choose when they would like to serve themselves. Assisted by a staff member, they bake bread for their afternoon snack. They confidently change into their outdoor clothing when they wish to go outside, and they are free to choose any activities – indoors and outside – whenever they wish. On the day of the first reaccreditation visit, children were observed helping a staff member to carry out safety checks in the garden. The adult gave the children very good opportunities to contribute their thoughts about why they needed to carry out safety checks and what could happen if this was not done.

Children in the St. Nicholas room have been involved in preparing a booklet which shows the ground rules of their classroom. The adults recognise children's need to make their own choices and they foster this independence. Following a recommendation made at the first visit, the director and manager have given staff clear guidelines about managing children's behaviour. On the second visit, the adults were more consistent in their communications with children and demonstrated improved skill in setting boundaries. This has helped enhance the children's respect for others and for their learning environment.

In the Santa Maria room, the babies' independence was observed to have developed significantly between the first and second visits. The changes made to the layout and content of this room will have contributed to this improvement. Staff in the Santa Maria

room should continue to introduce opportunities which further challenge its children, such as introducing more activities for self-care.

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

Links with parents are very strong. When children start at the nursery, parents are invited to a Montessori workshop and regular newsletters keep them informed about planned activities. On the morning of the first reaccreditation visit, several parents said that they had sent their children to Jelly Beans Montessori Nursery because older siblings had been there, and the parents had been very happy with their progress, particularly their readiness for school. They spoke about the online learning journal and how this has helped them to support their children's learning at home. In addition, staff give them a brief summary of their child's day at the end of the session. More detailed feedback is given by each child's key person at parent evenings, which are held twice a year.

A full digital report is prepared for each child when they leave to go to school and this, together with the child's learning journal, is shared with parents and also with the child's next setting. The director organises an event at the end of each school year where key people from all three of the Jelly Beans nurseries can meet with their key children's next teachers. Other events such as 'Families Week' and a sponsored reading event provide opportunities for staff and children's family members to get to know each other. The nursery's policies and procedures are available for parents in the reception area and newsletters and brochures from primary schools in the area are also available.

### **Staff: qualifications, deployment, and performance management**

The staff team at Jelly Beans Montessori Nursery is qualified with appropriate childcare qualifications and the director has provided a wide selection of training opportunities from Montessori sources in addition to local authority training. The director is striving to encourage more of her staff to undertake Montessori qualifications, as this would provide a stronger base for the team with which to establish some of the exciting initiatives, particularly regarding children's freedom, which she would like to fully embed.

The staff induction and monitoring procedures are clearly defined – all staff are given job descriptions and an organisation chart is available in the staffroom so that staff members can see the structure of the company and how their role fits into this. Annual appraisals and six-weekly supervision meetings are held by the manager and a programme of peer observations is in place, which helps the adults to reflect on their practice. The recent introduction of a mentoring system is firmly embedded, whereby Montessori staff from other areas of the company support new staff to work through the 'Jelly Beans Induction' manual. This has been well received by staff members who say that that it has helped them gain a better understanding of the Montessori approach. The director and nursery manager also use this manual daily to support the adults in learning more about Montessori practice.

Staff meetings are held monthly and these are recorded for all staff. Staff deployment is handled by the manager and is very thorough. Each room has a daily chart on which the numbers and ages of children and the staff to child ratios are recorded, so that staff members can easily work out where they should be. A rota in each room ensures that staff members know in advance whether they will be indoors or outside, depending on where children decide to work. The adults at Jelly Beans Montessori Nursery are extremely warm and nurturing – they interact very calmly and quietly with the children and they understand what makes each child unique. Combined with the director’s enthusiasm, this is a strong foundation on which to further develop the team’s growing understanding of Montessori practice.

Name of Assessor: Susie Norman

Date of first visit: 4<sup>th</sup> December 2018

Date of second visit: 29<sup>th</sup> March 2019

Date report submitted: First visit – 8<sup>th</sup> December 2018  
Second visit – 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2019