



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) and subsequent revisions. 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.

Hopes and Dreams Montessori Nursery School

339-341 City Road, Islington, London EC1V 1LJ

Date of the first re-accreditation visit: 30 April 2014

Date of second re-accreditation visit: 1 August 2014

Date of the previous MEAB accreditation: June 2011

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

Description of the school

Hopes and Dreams Montessori Nursery School is situated in the London Borough of Islington. It is housed in a large Victorian building in a mixed residential and commercial area. The school has sole use of the premises and accepts children from 3 months to 5 years of age. On a daily basis all children access the garden, which contains plant pots, a climbing wall, and sand and water tables. The nearby local park is used for regular outings. The nursery operates on five spacious floors, with five separate classrooms. The ground floor comprises the reception, buggy area, and main office and store room. The basement has two toddler rooms; the Shooting Stars Room for 15 to 21 month olds and the Starlight Room for those aged 20 to 30 months. This floor also has a kitchen, bathroom, laundry room and access to the garden. The baby rooms for 3 to 15 months, which are called the Sunshine and Goldilocks Rooms, are on the first floor. The second floor has a Montessori classroom for the age range 30 to 60 months, the Snowdrops Room. The third floor also has a Montessori classroom for the same age range, the Rainbow Room, along with a staff room and a kitchenette. All rooms have good access to toilets, which are clearly designated for child or adult use.



The school is registered for 123 children and there are currently 145 children on roll. Of these, 61 are under 2 years of age, 40 are 2 to 3 years, and 44 are 3 to 5 years of age.

Sessional care and full days are offered between 08:00 and 18:00, with a 'later' hour offered from 18:00 to 19:00, and the school is open for 50 weeks of the year. Almost all the children attending do full days. Lunch is cooked on the premises and provided for all the children. Hopes and Dreams was established in 1997 under the current ownership. The setting is able to support children for whom English is an additional language and those with additional needs or disabilities.

The managing director holds an NNEB qualification and a Certificate in Post Qualifying Studies (Childcare). The nursery manager holds an NVQ3 and a Post Graduate Diploma in Montessori Teaching. Almost all of the twenty-five staff working directly with the children hold suitable childcare qualifications for the age range that they work with, and seven hold Montessori diplomas. The school has received the NDNA 'Quality Counts' award and has achieved the highest grade in their Local Authority Quality Indicators.

Summary

Hopes and Dreams Montessori Nursery School has a Montessori ethos and is exceptionally well managed. It offers a nurturing and enriching environment with high levels of care and education for all the children attending. It provides for the needs of children from a diverse community of working parents. The school has a wide range of good quality, stimulating resources to promote excellent learning opportunities for all the children. Children's learning is well-supported by the outstanding teamwork of the carefully selected and trained staff who practice the Montessori approach. Excellent planning and record-keeping procedures link the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) to Montessori practice. The recording of assessments of children's progress is outstanding and user-friendly for staff and parents. The school environment is welcoming and the staff have a warm and friendly approach; they are good role-models for the children in their care. The partnership with parents and carers is impressive and they appreciate the meticulous attention to detail achieved in all aspects of the education of their children as well as the daily feedback that they receive from the staff. There were no recommendations from the previous MEAB accreditation. Following the first re-accreditation visit staff developed the potential of the garden to develop the stimulating outdoor learning environment.

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:



- Introduce regular peer observations as a means of promoting best Montessori practice.

Philosophy:

This high quality Montessori setting achieves its aims, which are to provide outstanding early years education for children through creative and hands-on play and learning experiences in a safe, stimulating environment. Knowledgeable staff support the children to develop their potential and encourage independence by facilitating natural exploration and discreetly guiding their development. Children have positive experiences of care as high levels of trust are evident throughout the nursery in meeting the needs of all the children, including those under 2 years of age. Staff interactions with the children are mutually respectful and a serene calmness is evident in all the rooms. Opportunities for the development of self-initiated learning and self-discipline are outstanding as children choose resources in accordance with their needs and interests.

Staff have a very good knowledge of their role in the implementation of Montessori principles. The Montessori philosophy is reflected in all aspects of practice in the setting. The philosophy is clearly defined in writing, on the website, in the parent handbook and in information easily accessible to parents in the reception area, where they are given time and space to read it to the accompaniment of background music. The principles, goals and philosophy are reviewed regularly through staff meetings, supervision and internal training.

Learning and Development:

All areas of learning are comprehensively covered throughout the thoughtfully planned environments for all age groups. Indoors, the children learn through hands-on experiences and gain practical life skills that help increase their self-esteem. Children choose activities and work at their own pace. The rooms and outdoor area provide a warm and welcoming environment in which staff plan adult-led activities according to children's interests. Staff are excellent role models for the children and set ground rules in each room which they review with the children regularly. A good balance is achieved between child-led, adult-initiated and group play both indoors and outdoors. The outside area is shared between all age groups on a rota basis and is accessed through one of the toddler rooms in the basement. Staff make good use of the reception area to prepare the children for going outdoors so as not to disturb the toddlers' use of their space. Since the first re-accreditation visit staff plan for a range of garden activities on a weekly basis and display this plan, thus enabling the management team to monitor the use of the garden as a prepared learning environment in which planned learning is promoted through high quality interaction between staff and children.

Children learn about different cultures in great detail by celebrating global weeks and festivals, tasting new foods and sharing different traditions from around the world. The



positive relationship between parents and staff ensures co-operation in sharing the interests of the children. Healthy lifestyles are promoted particularly through outdoor activities in the park and garden, walks within the local area and eating fresh organic food.

The Montessori curriculum is linked with the EYFS Framework in the planning, recording and assessment through the electronic web-based record keeping system 'My Montessori Child', which is used in the pre-school classrooms. The child's records are printed out for parents evenings and are placed in the individual 'profile' document. In the other rooms 'development matters' guidance is colour coded to indicate the rate of progress. Staff record observations spontaneously and effectively for all of the children in their room, both on sticky labels and on a wall chart to enable prompt adjustments to the focus area by the key person for their key children. These observations are later recorded in each child's individual profile for sharing with parents. Each child also has a journey book in which they may choose to keep samples of their drawings, paintings, collages or photographs to record progress. The profile contains helpful information about the child, from their commencement at the setting to long, focused observations of them that are used in planning and in monitoring their use of resources. The mandatory two year old assessment is completed as soon as a child is 24 months old. The attention to detail in observations and record keeping ensure each child's individual learning path is monitored carefully.

Planning is clearly displayed in each room for both parents and staff. Weekly planning involves all staff and is done in each room separately; it reflects children's interests, parents' feedback and a focus on individual children. Parents receive information sheets to fill in about their child's home interests and learning; these are shared with the key person who, in turn, uses this information for planning. Long term planning includes all festivals and events that the school celebrates throughout the year. Termly excursions, events and regular visits to the local park are organised and based on observations of children's interests, needs and suggestions from both parents and staff. Staff plan excursions to the fire station and the library to learn about their local community. Planned road safety projects enable the children to understand and focus on safety issues. Two qualified Early Years Professional Status (EYPS) staff assess the effectiveness of the provision for learning and development through an overview of the planning and through training of new staff.

The role of the adults is outstanding in supporting the use of the learning environment, and since the first re-accreditation visit includes the garden area. Two staff are designated Special Education Needs Co-ordinators (SENCo's) who take the lead in supporting inclusion in the setting.

Prepared Environment: resources and materials

An excellent range of high quality resources are accessible to all the children. The school provides a suitably organised, well planned, orderly environment with ample resources and space for children to move freely. Each room's layout is meticulously planned to suit



the age range of its children. All Montessori materials are complete and in excellent condition, with the rooms divided into areas of learning. These are complemented by other resources that enhance the learning opportunities of the children, for example, computers with large coloured keyboards for the older children and a climbing frame and slide indoors for the younger children. The latter all benefit from having low-level shelves and baskets of interesting materials accessible by the children around their rooms.

The storage of the resources is exceptionally good, as those not in current use are housed in cupboards and do not clutter the rooms. Space saving furniture is used to maximise floor space for the younger children. The tables used for lunch have detachable legs for easy storage. All chairs for the younger children are low level and wooden with detachable stacking trays. The baby room has separate sleeping and play areas, and soft furnishings for the comfort of the non-mobile infants. Double buggies are used to take children on local outdoor trips. High visibility jackets, reins for children and raincoats for all are supplied to facilitate outings in all weathers. The staff are diligent in their preparation and maintenance of the environment to enable children to fully access it. Since the first re-accreditation visit, staff in all classrooms plan and prepare learning activities to take place in the garden, in addition to the benefit which children receive from its permanent opportunities to observe mini-beasts and water the plants in containers. There is also a climbing wall, which gives children opportunities for risk-taking, new blackboards and sand and water trays. More opportunities could be made of introducing practical life activities in the outdoor classroom.

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

The staff support children's independence in all the rooms by enabling them to initiate their play, choose from resources or participate in group activities. High levels of independence are encouraged in the toddler rooms where the children are all able to feed themselves at lunch time and wipe their own hands. Snack tables are available throughout the day in each room, offering healthy snacks and water, which the older children pour themselves. Visual aids in the form of photographs are clearly displayed in the toddler rooms to help children to communicate their needs. Resource baskets and activities are at the children's level, which encourages them to choose independently.

Staff trust children to initiate their learning by selecting resources, handling them with care and returning them to the shelves afterwards. The younger children learn to tidy up, with staff role -modelling the process. Montessori resources are accessible for the pre-school children at all times and designated areas for other activities and materials which support the Montessori areas of learning are well-considered, of good quality and stored in an orderly manner. There are sufficient materials to enable several children to work simultaneously in the same area. The setting uses a self-registering system that allows children to independently choose where they wish to work indoors, and if they wish to go to the garden, park or library, which are all a regular occurrence. Daily routines are clearly displayed in each room, all of which have routines for rest and play



times for the children. Children are involved in decision making and are confident in sharing their ideas and views with peers and with staff. Staff value children's views, they praise their efforts and guide and support their development. Children learn practical and self-care skills, for example how to brush their hair and wash their hands. Activities are accessed by children individually or in small groups. Children have a sense of responsibility for and ownership of their learning environment. Staff ensure that they also develop an awareness of recycling paper and materials for art and craft.

Daily communication with parents facilitates discussion about their child's achievements and how to further their learning at home. The setting's monthly 'Parents Memo' has practical tips and suggestions to foster children's independence at home. Suggestions and next steps for each child are discussed at settling-in review meetings, for the mandatory two year old assessment and at parents' evenings. 'I can do' cards are sent home identifying new skills or learning goals achieved.

The Equality and Diversity Officer ensures that activities are designed to coincide with parents' cultural backgrounds to enable children to respect all nationalities. Organised events such as 'Grandparent's Day' enable children to develop respect for elders in the community and Makaton signs on display throughout the setting promote understanding of differently-abled children.

Montessori practice: Classroom management

All children experience child-led play and adult planned presentations as well as group activities. Children aged 30 to 60 months have a 2½ hour morning work cycle in place during which they choose activities and are guided and supported by the staff. In the other rooms children are very happy as they also have freedom and uninterrupted play supported when appropriate by adults.

Some of the children also go to the park in small groups after lunch.

Effective induction procedures prepare staff well for their roles and daily routines which are recorded clearly, reviewed and discussed regularly. Senior members of staff conduct individual supervision meetings to ensure all staff are aware of their responsibilities and are offered support and guidance. Staff are deployed effectively in all rooms and present new activities to individuals or groups during the work cycle. The outdoor learning is effectively supervised by appointed staff.

From 30 months children are in a mixed age group, while the younger children in the basement are in adjacent rooms and see all the staff and children from the rest of the setting as they go to the garden. The sleeping arrangements after lunch enable all children beyond the baby room to sleep in one of the rooms allocated to their age group. As children wake up they are taken to the second room for that age group where they may choose from the range of activities. The babies follow their own routines within their designated area of the setting. Children are mixed in a wider age range if they attend for breakfast, as well as in the garden and on outings.



The overview of policies and procedures by management is robust because they work in the rooms on a daily basis and understand when support is needed. Ground rules for the classrooms are in place and are reviewed regularly. Managers are additional to the rooms' staffing ratio and step into room roles if required, so children benefit from always having adults with them who they know and trust. Weekly staff memos update staff on events and changes and regular meetings are held to discuss topics and issues. The information on children with allergies and special dietary requirements is on display in each room and each child has an individual tablemat which has a photograph of them and a list of foods which they must not be given. Each room has a 'transition folder' to familiarise parents with a move to the next room and key person, and other staff within it. French, Spanish and ballet take place in the afternoon on Monday to Wednesday, the work cycle having been made available to all children in the morning

Montessori Practice: links with parents, including reports and records

Parents have exceptionally good access to the effective policies and procedures both in the spacious reception area and via the website. In addition, a booklet, *Hopes and Dreams Guide to the Montessori Classroom*, is available in the reception area. Parents are sent newsletters, on-line planning information, memos and the year-planner to keep them informed of events. Staff involve them in their child's learning and development through regular parents' evenings, play afternoons and settling-in review meetings. Parents give feedback regarding the provision and their child's learning by completing biannual questionnaires, which help management evaluate children's and parents' needs and act on suggestions to improve the service. Where daily feedback cannot be given directly to a parent at the end of the day a communication book is sent home, and an 'Ask me about...' form is sent home when a child has accomplished something significant. Parents complete a feedback form after their meetings with staff, and the management team and key persons evaluate these forms to focus on individual needs of parents and children. Leavers' questionnaires also help the management team to evaluate the provision. The child's individual profile also includes a transition form for feedback, the settling-in report and the EYFS Development Matters tick charts. A report is prepared for children when they leave the setting. Parents may readily access information on their child's achievements through a secure electronic web link reporting system, My Montessori Child.

The setting operates a fingerprint entrance system and 24-hr CCTV. Daily checks are carried out on the premises for safety and cleanliness.

The nursery school participates in fundraising events throughout the year and has a designated charity co-ordinator who organises and oversees charity events and liaises with the senior staff in each room. Parents are involved in the planning of these events and are also invited to share their cultural background with the children. Each room organises parents' fun afternoons, Montessori afternoons and invites parents to join in for specific activities. The parent partnership is strong.



Staffing:

The organisational structure and leadership of this setting is clearly documented and displayed for parents and staff. Monthly management meetings discuss development matters and these contribute to their development plan. The managing director actively participates in the running of the setting together with a manager, deputy manager and assistant deputy manager. Certain responsibilities are delegated to other staff members and a clear management structure operates in each of the rooms. The management team comprises five staff, all with NVQ3 or above, of whom four hold a Montessori diploma, one holds QTS status and two have EYPS. Twenty-five staff work directly with the children, of whom twenty-one have NVQ3 or above, and of these seven hold a Montessori Diploma. A number of staff members are currently training to enhance their qualifications including one who is working towards a Montessori diploma. Four staff work in housekeeping and the kitchen, while five staff work in the office. Two of the staff are part-time. Staff working with the under 2s are very experienced in managing the needs of these children.

A thorough induction programme is provided for new staff within their three months' probation period. Senior staff in each room allocate time to induct new staff members regarding individual room routines and responsibilities, including planning, record keeping and assessment. Job descriptions are in place for each staff role. The management team monitors action points that are in the minutes of the regular room and team meetings. Observations of staff by management enable them to assess the quality of teaching at the school and inform annual staff appraisals and the six-monthly reviews. All staff are offered the opportunity to embark on Montessori courses and the management is proactive in arranging in-house training and external EYFS courses. Regular peer observations should be considered as a means of promoting best Montessori practice. Teamwork is outstanding, enabling the children to enjoy their learning. A culture of continuous self-evaluation by the management team, staff and parents promotes prompt responsiveness to stakeholders' needs and the updating of practice. The management team's commitment to the Montessori ethos is strong and this inspires the staff to implement a Montessori learning environment for all the children.

Name of Assessor: Anne McConway

Date of reports: First visit – 5/05/2014

Second visit – 5/08/2014