

# **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.

### **Hopes and Dreams Montessori Nursery School**

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

Date of previous MEAB accreditation: November 2014

Date of first reaccreditation visit: 21 June 2017

Date of second reaccreditation visit: 12 October 2017

This accreditation is valid until December 2021

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

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

Hopes and Dreams Montessori Nursery School is situated in a large Georgian building set in a mixed residential and commercial area of Islington. The nursery has sole use of the premises that include a garden which contains plant pots, a climbing wall, sand and water tables, a slide, a play house and a mud kitchen. Each classroom has daily scheduled use of the garden. The local park is also used regularly. Indoors, there are five spacious floors, with five separate classroom areas. The ground floor comprises the reception, a buggy area, the main office and storeroom, with extra office space on a mezzanine floor. The basement has the two toddler rooms: ‘Shooting Stars Room’ for children aged 15 to 21 months old and ‘Starlight Room’ for those aged 21 to 30 months. This floor also has a kitchen, a laundry room and access to the garden. On the first floor

'Sunshine and Goldilocks' comprise the baby rooms for children aged 3 to 15 months. These two rooms provide a sleeping area and play spaces. The second and third floors each have a Montessori classroom for the pre-school age range, 30 to 60 months, which are called 'Snowdrops Room' and the 'Rainbow Room'. There is also a staff room and kitchenette here. All rooms have good access to lavatories, which are clearly designated for child or adult use.

The nursery is registered for 123 children and there are currently 124 enrolled. Of these, 56 are under 2 years of age. On the day of the second reaccreditation visit 38 under 2 year olds and 50 children aged 2 to 5 years were present all day. The nursery is open for 50 weeks of the year. Sessional care and full days are offered between 08.00 and 18.00, with additional late provision offered from 18.00 to 19.00. Currently all the children attend for full days. Breakfast, lunch and tea are prepared on the premises and provided for all the children. Special dietary requirements are catered for. The setting is also able to support children for whom English is an additional language and those with other additional needs.

Hopes and Dreams Montessori Nursery School was established in 1997 by the current owner who is the managing director. She works part-time at the setting and covers for the manager's absence. She holds an NNEB qualification and a Certificate in Post Qualifying Studies (Childcare). The full-time nursery manager holds a Certificate in Management of Early Years Settings as well as NVQ Level 3 and a Montessori diploma. There are 40 further members of staff, including kitchen staff, housekeeping personnel and office staff; 26 work directly with the children and all work full-time in shift patterns. The management team includes the managing director, the manager, deputy manager and two Early Years Teachers. All but one of those working with the children have relevant childcare qualifications for the age range that they work with. Eight have a Montessori qualification and 14 of the staff working with the under 2 year olds are qualified to NVQ Level 3 or above. On the day of the second visit all the adults employed, including office, housekeeping and kitchen staff, were present all day, 14 of whom worked with the under 2 year olds. The nursery supports staff training and student teachers. It has received the National Day Nurseries Association's 'Quality Counts' award and has achieved the highest grade in its local authority's quality indicator ratings.

## Summary

The Montessori ethos is evident in all aspects of this exceptionally well-managed nursery school. The team is committed to planning and delivering excellent learning experiences for the children and to ensuring that all areas of their development are provided for comprehensively. The attention paid to the preparation of the learning environment demonstrates staff members' understanding of the needs of the children. Their respect for, and trust in, the children's capacity to learn are reflected in all areas of daily practice, helped by outstanding teamwork. Children are given plenty of time to investigate and explore self-chosen resources across the age groups. This approach fully supports the children's creative and critical thinking.

The excellent planning and record-keeping procedures link the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) to the Montessori curriculum effectively. Various methods are used for the planning, recording and assessing of the children's learning and development, both handwritten and web-based. These are very comprehensive and user-friendly for staff and for parents, and are kept securely. Partnership with the parents is outstanding and they appreciate the daily feedback that they receive from staff and the attention to detail achieved in all aspects of their children's welfare and education.

Following the first reaccreditation visit, the management team has successfully guided and supported staff members in making the recommended improvements to their practice, particularly in the management of meal times. The nursery has also continued to reflect on ways to promote Montessori best practice by improving its peer on peer observation process, as recommended at the previous MEAB accreditation.

***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:***

- consider ways by which the children can mix more across the age range, such as by offering them the opportunity to regularly visit other classes; and
- extend the use of labeling in the children's rooms to support their language development and emerging literacy.

#### **Philosophy:**

The nursery's commitment to the principles of Montessori education is evident. The calm atmosphere in all the rooms and the sense of engagement and purpose radiating throughout the nursery and its management represent this commitment to offering a high quality Montessori learning experience for all the children.

All the adults have a very good understanding of their role in implementing the Montessori principles. Staff interactions with children are mutually respectful and the children, including the very young ones, are trusted to lead their own learning. They benefit from the freedom to make choices about where to work and with whom in their area of the setting. The adults create learning opportunities in line with the developmental stages of the children and discreetly guide their progress.

The children are separated into five age ranges, but these different groups have some opportunities to mix together in the garden, on visits to the park, at breakfast and during rest times. Vertical age-grouping is evident in the pre-school classes. This is very beneficial to all those in these rooms, as evidenced by the way the older children show responsibility and act as positive role-models for the younger ones. This was seen during the first reaccreditation visit when an older child showed a younger one how to

build the Montessori Binomial Cube. More mixing across the age ranges could be achieved throughout the nursery by, for example, encouraging the older children to help in the toddler or baby rooms at meal times. This would also help ease transition between classes, as children would have more opportunity to get to know each other.

The Montessori philosophy is promoted well in all aspects of the nursery's practice and is clearly defined in writing in the parent handbook and on the website. The parents are fully informed of the policies and procedures. They are sent newsletters, online information (such as about activities), memos and the yearly planner to keep them informed. The principles, goals and philosophy are reviewed when necessary during staff meetings, supervision and training days.

### **Learning and Development:**

There is a very good balance between adult-led and child-initiated activities and the work cycle in the pre-school classes is over three hours long in the morning. The toddlers also have at least 2½ hours to select activities independently. The garden is accessible all day but due to its size, location and the layout of the building, the children can only use it during their allotted times. All the children who need to rest are offered facilities for sleeping. The babies follow their own routines and sleep and feed when they need to throughout the day. During the afternoon the majority of the children sleep and they are also offered planned activities, which complements the morning's work cycle routine. Music groups are provided across the age range, sport activities are offered for those beyond the baby room, and the pre-school rooms also have modern language classes and ballet during the afternoon, giving the children a varied day.

Long term planning includes the Montessori curriculum and annual festivals and events. Weekly planning is clearly displayed in each room for both parents and staff. One of the outstanding features of this nursery is the practice the management team employs of delegating the responsibility for planning to all members of teaching staff, as all take turns to plan a week. Each room plans separately to reflect the children's interests, parents' feedback and staff members' intended observations. This ensures that the needs of each age group can be met. Furthermore, a member of staff on weekly rotation draws up planning for activities in the garden and an Outdoor Coordinator oversees this provision. The children are taken on excursions, which are often based on their observed interests, and the local park is also used regularly. Members of the management team monitor all planning and record-keeping.

Planned topics are integrated into the daily activities. On the day of the first reaccreditation visit the project in the pre-school classes was 'fruit and vegetables'. The children had the opportunity to smell, feel and taste a selection. In one of these rooms the children also enjoyed washing dolls. Staff extended this activity to increase its sensory appeal by adding a product called 'Instant Snow'. Another bowl was used for washing dinosaurs.

Parents receive an information sheet to fill in about their child's interests and learning at home, and these are shared with the key person who uses this information to plan for

the child. This is a comprehensive system tailored to reflect the individual needs of each child and his or her family. The majority of the staff members' observations of each child are documented in their web-based record, which their parents are also able to contribute to and access securely when they choose. The children are very well supported in their learning and development as the team has excellent communication, both verbally and online with parents.

The nursery closely follows the Montessori early years curriculum and places strong emphasis on providing opportunities for creativity and critical thinking. This was seen during the first visit in activities for sorting animals into different categories, in number work and in various construction activities. Following the first visit, the addition of written labels in different languages has provided the staff and children with the opportunity to celebrate the linguistic diversity of the setting. Staff could develop this practice by labeling more objects in English, such as on the nature tables, to further promote children's language and literacy. One staff member is the designated Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities Coordinator and takes the lead in supporting inclusion in the setting. She is supernumerary. The provision for learning and development for each child is very good.

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

In each of the five classrooms the layout is carefully planned to suit the age range of its children. There is an outstanding range of high quality resources, which are complete and in excellent condition, set out in well-defined curriculum areas. They are very well looked after by both staff and children. All the children are encouraged to keep their classrooms tidy, with staff role-modeling the process. Resources that enhance the learning opportunities for the children complement the range of Montessori materials. For example, various construction sets, a computer and puzzles are provided in the pre-school classes, as well as resources for role-play. These rooms have a nature table with items relating to the current topic or season as well as pet fish. Items in this area could be better labelled. The toddler indoor provision includes a climbing frame and slide, mirrors and blocks, as well as baskets with interesting resources to explore. Each room has areas for physical activities as well as quiet places to rest.

The rooms are uncluttered as the availability of storage space is excellent. Furniture is placed so as to maximize the floor area for the children. Most of the tables and chairs are of a suitable size and height for the age group they cater for. The furniture in the toddler rooms is arranged in such a way as to promote crawling, cruising and toddling, allowing children to move around and reach the materials of their choice. The rooms are equipped with baskets of resources that promote investigation, discovery and sensory play. The baby floor has six separate areas: two changing areas, two play spaces, a sleeping area and an area which is equipped with soft furnishings for the comfort of the non-mobile infants. Suitable resources, including treasure baskets and materials to support heuristic play, are plentiful. There are room dividers with gates so that the very young children can be kept separate if appropriate.

Whilst there is an artificial surface in the garden area, care has been taken to introduce



children to nature as plants are grown around the edge in planters. The children are offered a good range of outdoor resources that are changed regularly. On the day of the second reaccreditation visit the children had access to sand and a wide plastic container full of leaves. On the day of the first visit the very young children observed using the garden played in water and enjoyed the sensation of getting wet as well as using bubbles creatively. One child filled a bowl with 'bubble food'. As the children are taken to the local park regularly, double buggies, high visibility jackets and other necessary items are all supplied to make outings possible in all weathers.

In response to a pollution survey in the local neighbourhood, the owner has installed an electric air filter in each room to provide clean air to breath in this inner city location. The whole setting provides the children with a well-prepared learning environment.

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

The adults support children's independence in all the rooms by enabling them to make choices: to initiate their own play and self-select resources, or to participate in group activities. All the resources are easily accessible for the children, which encourages them to fetch these for themselves. High levels of independence are encouraged, such as in the toddler rooms where the children are all able to feed themselves at meal times and wipe their own hands. Ground rules are clear and reviewed with the children. Books and visual aids are used to promote children's awareness of expected behaviour. Staff members help the children to communicate their needs clearly.

The adults value the children's opinions and they allow them to be involved in decision-making. For example, the pre-school children self-register their choices to work indoors, in the garden or to go to the park or local library when these options become available. This freedom of choice is very well managed by staff. The children have a sense of responsibility for looking after their learning environment and staff members ensure that they also develop awareness of recycling and respect for self and others. Equality and diversity are emphasised and activities are designed to include individual children's cultural backgrounds. Excellent communication with parents, both verbally, handwritten and electronically, helps support parents to extend their children's independence at home.

All the children, once they are able to, can help themselves to a healthy snack during each session and, following a recommendation from the first reaccreditation visit, can now wash up their crockery afterwards. This offers them a real opportunity to develop life skills. Children's independence has also been further promoted during the breakfast routine, which has given them the opportunity to demonstrate to their accompanying parents how capable they are by helping themselves to breakfast and clearing their plates. An unforeseen consequence of this improvement is that the children are now eating better, as they are given the opportunity to make truly independent and appropriate choices. Breakfast is served in the toddlers' area, the rest of the meals take place in the children's own rooms and the babies have all their meals in their own room.

Following the first visit, profound changes have also been made to improve the transition to lunch. This new routine has led staff to successfully extend the morning work cycle and has given the children the opportunity to use and enhance their skills in preparing the lunch tables themselves. This promotes more of a family atmosphere at meal times. The children are able to help themselves to the food but are guided by a member of staff who sits and eats with them. Whole group circle time has been replaced by spontaneous learning in smaller groups, attended only by those who are interested in the topic on offer. One of the outstanding features of this nursery is the way the adults are able to respond to suggestions for improvement, as they have shown by implementing the recommendations made at the first visit for the benefit of the children in their care.

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

The parents feel very well supported and enjoy the events that are planned to include them. They are regularly invited into the classrooms as each room organises open afternoons for parents and also invites them in to join specific activities. Two parents' evenings a year are organised. Written paper records for each child are shared with their parents every day. Parents are also given daily verbal reports and written observations are visible to them on the web-based recording system. They feel very involved in their children's learning. Regular newsletters, the parent handbook, and the very informative website, as well as a much-visited social media page, all contribute to this feeling of involvement.

All staff members contribute to the children's records but it is the responsibility of the child's key person to ensure that these are up to date. The Early Years Teachers oversee this process. As the nursery is open for ten hours a day, a 'buddy' key person system is in place to support children when their own key person is unavailable. It was recommended at the first reaccreditation visit that the key persons focus their observations of the child more precisely by identifying critical insight to help pinpoint developmental needs and plan their next steps. This change is now embedded in their practice. The child's records are printed out for parents evenings and are also used as a transition document. These documents are kept in the child's 'individual profile' along with any extra information gathered on the child. Each child also has a 'Journey Book' in which they may choose to keep samples of their drawings, paintings, collages or photographs. The mandatory two year old progress check is completed as soon as a child reaches this age and the parents are required to make a significant contribution to this assessment. Attention to detail in observations and record-keeping, and the sharing of information with parents, ensure that each child's individual learning path is monitored carefully and their interests are met.

The nursery school participates in fundraising events throughout the year and has a designated charity co-ordinator who organises and oversees these. Parents are also involved in this planning. They are invited into the nursery to share their cultural heritage with the children and the setting also organises a 'Grandparents Day'. The partnership between the setting and its families is outstanding.

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

The organisational structure and leadership of this nursery is clearly documented and displayed for parents and staff. The managing director works hard to further develop existing good practice and she demonstrates a profound commitment to the nursery, while delegating the day to day running of it to her competent manager, deputy manager and Early Years Teachers. As the management team members work different shifts they provide cover in each other's absence and, all being supernumerary, they can also cover for staff absence. Responsibilities are delegated to other staff members too and a clear organisational structure operates in each of the rooms. This is a very well qualified team: ten have degrees, many in education. The two Early Years Teachers have Early Years Teacher Status and one also has Qualified Teacher Status, which another member of staff also has.

A thorough induction programme is provided for new staff members. They are comprehensively supported by members of the management team, who take time to share best practice with them. All the staff's documentation, including job descriptions and staff and student handbooks, is regularly reviewed and includes reference to the Montessori approach. There is an ongoing school development plan and monthly managerial meetings are held at which strategies for implementing the plan are discussed. Five formal minuted meetings for all the staff take place each year and room meetings also take place regularly. Observations of staff by members of the management team enable them to assess the quality of teaching at the nursery, and peer on peer observations are also embedded in the practice. These both feed into the supervision and appraisal process. All staff members are offered the opportunity to embark on Montessori courses and the management team is supportive and proactive in arranging in-house training and external courses. Strong teamwork is evident throughout the setting. All the adults exhibit enthusiasm and a strong commitment to the children and to Montessori practice.

Name of Assessor: Charlotte White

Date report submitted: First visit – 23 June 2017

Second visit – 12 October 2017