



# **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.

### **The Little Learners Montessori Nursery**

St Vitus Hall, Gillingham Road, Cricklewood, London NW2 1HR

Date of previous MEAB accreditation: June 2013

Date of first re-accreditation visit: 20 November 2015

Date of second re-accreditation visit: 9 March 2016

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

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

The Little Learners Montessori is located in Cricklewood, in the London Borough of Barnet. It occupies the St Vitus Hall, a fully self-contained and purpose-built single-storey nursery, with an enclosed outdoor play area. It comprises two rooms for the children, with free-flow between, although the older ones are encouraged to use the classroom which has the Montessori materials and the younger ones are predominantly in the room with a kitchen attached, a changing area and outdoor access. The nursery is open 48 weeks a year on weekdays, with morning sessions from 08.00 to 13.00, afternoon sessions from 13.00 to 18.00 and whole day sessions 08.00 to 18.00. There are 46 children on roll and a maximum of 40 children may attend at any one time. Children attend a wide range of sessions, with a minimum of three per week. The number of children present during the morning of the second visit was 35 and during the afternoon 29, with 23 staying all day. Provision is made for children with additional needs, including those for whom English is an additional language (EAL). More than half of the children have EAL and the setting serves a culturally diverse community.

The nursery was first registered in 2012. It is owned by three highly qualified early



years' practitioners who also own three other local Montessori nurseries. The owners have appointed a manager and a deputy manager to run the setting on a day to day basis. There are thirteen members of staff including the owners, nine of whom work directly with the children. Eleven of the team hold relevant childcare qualifications and five are employed full time, including the manager. Seven were present during both the morning and afternoon sessions of the second visit. Cooked lunches are provided on the premises by external caterers.

## Summary

The Little Learners Montessori is a welcoming and stimulating nursery, which is well- led and managed. The friendly, enthusiastic staff team is easily available at morning drop-off to speak to parents, who are encouraged to participate in the setting in a range of different ways, including attending sessions where they can see what their children do at the nursery. Part of the role of the teachers is to explain the Montessori philosophy to parents and to provide written information to support a consistency of approach between home and nursery for the benefit of the child. The day to day management is good and enables the caring staff to focus on the learning and development of the children.

Their positive relationships with the staff enable the children to develop confidence and self-esteem, to learn skills for independence and to follow their interests. Assessment is carried out and recent improvements have been made to the record-keeping system, but the rate of a child's progress cannot currently be tracked effectively. The recommendations from the previous MEAB accreditation have been met: the nursery has improved staff's awareness of how to extend each child's development and how to respond fully to their needs through extra support or guidance, it has implemented peer observations to enhance staff's self-evaluation, and developed a formal reporting process for school transitions.

***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:***

- Continue to implement plans to develop the outdoor classroom; and
- provide a wider range of age appropriate resources for the younger children.



### **Philosophy:**

The setting aims to make learning enjoyable, exciting and challenging by providing a prepared environment that meets the developmental needs of the children and offers them the freedom to develop at their own pace. Staff members provide stimulating learning opportunities, they support the children with guidance, and encourage them to treat each other with respect. Children are free to choose activities and pursue their own individual interests. The educational environment offers a variety of activities that suits their needs, interests and stages of development and the children feel comfortable to engage in activities with their peers and with staff.

The principles, goals and philosophy are defined in writing and are reviewed annually. Daily routines are on display in each classroom. The staff team has a sound knowledge and understanding of the Montessori philosophy, which they convey to parents on their first visit to the setting and thereafter at parent events.

### **Learning and Development:**

All areas of learning in the Montessori curriculum and the EYFS are included in the provision at The Little Learners, Cricklewood. Indoors, children have access to the Montessori materials. Both inside and outdoors they also have a range of other learning and development opportunities. The work cycles are two and a half hours long during both daily sessions.

Staff members plan the provision of Montessori activities well by observing the children's development and interests. A long observation is done when the child starts at the nursery and has settled in, and this is used as the basis for individual planning by the key person. Planning for each child is then drawn up weekly from their Montessori activity tracking document, which is paper-based. Planning for the group covers a new topic each month. This is linked to the changing needs and interests of the children as well as seasonal and cultural events. Links are made to the EYFS areas of learning in the long term, paper-based, plans. Children's learning and progress are recorded with photographs and observations on a secure electronic system that links this information with EYFS areas of learning and development.

On the second re-accreditation visit it was evident that frequent observations were made by the number of iPads available to the staff. Some observations of children's use of Montessori materials are recorded on the electronic system, while others are reported to parents at progress meetings. The Montessori curriculum is not yet fully linked with the EYFS areas of learning and development in the staff records of children's learning. It is recommended that the records are integrated to provide a single document, so that a child's progress can be tracked more effectively and comprehensively. Mandatory two year old progress checks are carried out and shared with parents.

The setting reflects well on the effectiveness of its provision for children's learning and



development. Adults support the children's use of the environment effectively, although more staff than usual were present and working with the children on the day of the first visit. The staff team capably support children who have additional needs and receive guidance from the setting's SENCo and from Barnet's Early Years Inclusion team.

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

This is a well-planned setting with a very good layout of Montessori and other learning materials in the classrooms. The room that the younger children are encouraged to use offers a range of everyday practical activities, art and crafts, construction, and a book and home corner. The provision is good although there are insufficient materials to refresh activities on a regular basis. It has direct access to the outdoor area.

The Montessori resources are set out in an orderly manner in the other classroom, which is mainly used by the older children and which also has a book corner, art and craft activities and a wide range of everyday practical activities that are easily accessible to the children. There is a good variety of resources including wall maps, a fish tank and many cultural materials in recognition of the diverse community that the nursery serves. The range of Montessori materials is complete and these are appealing, in good condition, clean and ready to use.

There are sufficient resources for the number of children attending and ample space is available for their use. All the resources are appropriate to the developmental needs of the children. Outside they have a pirate ship for climbing, a small play house, book corner, water, mud and sand play, painting, musical instruments and gardening activities. The outdoor area has an all-weather surface and a covered decking area which gets wet but children may benefit from its use all year round if plans to develop the outdoor area are implemented.

Overall this setting has good facilities for the children. Adults are diligent about preparing the environment fully for each session so that it is ready for use and the children are encouraged to help care for their learning environment.

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

Children are learning practical skills to develop their independence and they are able to choose suitable activities from low shelves during the work cycle. They decide when to have snack and cut up their own fruit. Children are given sufficient time to take off their shoes and put slippers on, they take turns laying the table for lunch and serve their own food, activities that encourage independence. Staff members trust the children to use the materials with care and return them to the shelves after use. Children are free to choose their own activities indoors and are given the time to complete the cycle of activity. Since the first re-accreditation visit children are permitted to go outdoors



whenever they indicate a wish to do so. The children's independence outdoors is supported by staff and enhanced by a range of activities, although plans to provide an outdoor classroom have yet to be implemented.

The children work individually or in small groups of their choice, they demonstrate respect for each other as the ground rules are explicit and the team encourages children to resolve their own disputes. Cultural diversity is celebrated. Staff members have an excellent relationship with parents and offer guidance on how to ensure a consistency of approach to independence at home by explaining to them how the setting promotes this for children at nursery.

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

The learning provision is well planned, with presentations of Montessori materials given and spontaneous learning taking place inside and outdoors. There is an appropriate balance between adult-led and child-initiated activities. The work cycle is two and a half hours during both the morning and afternoon sessions. Self-registration at the beginning of each session helps children identify their names. Children can choose when to go outdoors but need assistance from staff to achieve this. The afternoon work cycle has a greater mix across the age range than the morning cycle. Both morning and afternoon sessions offer the same good, high quality of work cycle for the children.

The staff team is organized effectively to carry out duties and responsibilities for the maintenance of the environment, and as key persons to offer a secure base for each child. The children know all the adults well in this caring setting and staff cover for each other when necessary. Children and all staff participate in checking the environment at the end of the work cycle to ensure that the materials are in the right place for the next session. Adults supervise the children very well including when they eat the cooked lunches provided by a catering company. Children choose their stainless steel cutlery and pass crockery and bowls of food around the table; this helps to develop good social skills including turn-taking. All the children eat together and also mix with those from the other classroom periodically throughout the day. Both classrooms have a book corner and sufficient space if a child needs to sleep. The policies and procedures are fully implemented to promote very good classroom management. Additional activities on offer to the children include yoga and music.

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

A monthly newsletter and the website provide parents with information on the Montessori curriculum and ethos. A 'Montessori at Home' board is informative and gives parents ideas on how to encourage their children's learning and development. Further information is accessible at coffee mornings/afternoons during which parents can see what the children do at nursery, and on the setting's social media page. The nursery holds parent/key person meetings at regular intervals through the year at which they share the records of progress on the Montessori curriculum. Every four months a paper-



based developmental summary report is given to parents to indicate the progress of their child, to which parents can add comments. The electronic records of observations, which are accessible to parents, do not yet link the Montessori curriculum with the EYFS areas of learning and development.

Staff members hold events for parents to get involved in the setting such as cultural days, concerts, parent workshops and trips, and they set up projects for the parents to complete with their children at home. Parents are welcome to come into the nursery to read a story or demonstrate cooking or crafts. The nursery offers sessions to suit family needs, and provides daily feedback to parents at hand-over; staff are welcoming and willing to answer parents' questions at drop-off and collection time. Questionnaires are circulated to parents to obtain their views on the setting and these are taken into account. Parents report that they are very happy with the provision and many chose it on the recommendation of other parents. Transition reports are written for parents and schools when a child leaves the setting. Families are well served by the provision of care and education in this setting.

### **Staffing:**

The strong leadership and management of this setting help make its practice highly effective. The organisational structure includes a manager and a deputy, who work very well together, monitored by the three highly qualified owners, who share practice between all four settings in this group of Montessori nurseries. The staff team is well qualified and include one who has an International Diploma in Montessori Pedagogy, one who has a Certificate in Montessori Theory and Methodology and three who have other level 3 qualifications in childcare and education. The manager has a BA Hons in Youth and Childhood Studies.

A comprehensive induction procedure is implemented for all new staff. All members of the team have job descriptions for their role and can access online training provided by the local authority. Supervision takes place regularly in addition to annual appraisals and peer observations. All staff members are encouraged to be reflective practitioners and effective systems are in place for continuous professional development. This is part of the setting's improvement plan, which focuses on enhancing the provision and outcomes for children. Written agendas are produced for regular staff meetings. This team of knowledgeable staff works together well, and this contributes to their enthusiasm for, and commitment to, Montessori practices.

Name of Assessor: Anne McConway

Date reports submitted: First visit – 26 November 2015  
Second visit – 10 March 2016