

Montessori Evaluation and Accreditation Board **School Accreditation**

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.

The Little Learners Montessori Watford

62 - 78 Merton Road, Watford, Hertfordshire WD18 0WY

This accreditation is valid until June 2023.

This accreditation report relates to the provision for children aged 6 months to 5 years old.

Description of the nursery:

The Little Learners Montessori Watford is located in Watford town centre. It is situated on the ground floor of converted commercial premises and has a large garden. The setting has four rooms for the children’s use, offices, a meeting room, staff room, cloakroom facilities and a kitchen. There is a baby room for children aged 6 to 20 months, a toddler room for children aged 20 months to 3 years and two pre-school rooms for the 3 to 5 year olds. The toddler room and one of the pre-school rooms have access to the outdoors. Hot lunches are cooked externally and delivered to the setting daily. Breakfast, snack and afternoon tea are also provided by the setting. Outdoors, there is a large open-plan play area with apparatus for physical development, a mud kitchen, sand and water area, hens and an extensive covered area. The nursery has sole use of the premises.

The setting is open five days a week for 50 weeks a year. Morning sessions run between the hours of 08.00 and 13.00 and afternoon sessions run from 13.00 until

18.00. The nursery can accommodate a maximum of 100 children between the ages of 6 months to 5 years old each session. There are currently 101 children enrolled. Most children attend either for the morning or both sessions and some attend just for the afternoon. On the day of the second accreditation visit 63 children attended during the morning, 47 stayed for the afternoon and were joined by 4 additional children. Twenty-seven staff members were present for the morning, with 23 remaining for the afternoon.

The nursery supports children with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and those for whom English is an additional language (EAL). It receives assistance for SEND from the local authority. This privately owned nursery school opened in 2017. It is owned by three highly qualified early years' practitioners, who also own four other local Montessori nurseries and who comprise the higher management team. There are 34 staff including the owners, twenty-one attend full-time. The owners oversee some aspects of management but do not attend the setting full-time. The appointed Manager and Deputy Manager have responsibility for the day-to-day running of the setting and there are lead practitioners for each age range. The owners deliver staff training, monitoring and support for the staff. Of the 30 who work directly with the children, five have Montessori qualifications and a further three are currently completing a Montessori qualification. The owners also are Montessori qualified. Twelve staff hold other relevant childcare qualifications, five of whom are qualified to level 6 or above.

Summary

The Little Learners Montessori Watford offers high quality Montessori provision. The premises are spacious and the learning environment is very well resourced and appealing to the children. Staff trust the children to learn by following their own interests and offer them the freedom to choose from a wide range of activities, both indoors and outside. Spontaneity of learning is highly valued in this stimulating environment. The children are well behaved; they show respect for each other and the environment and have good levels of independence in self-care skills. Staff plan relevant activities for individual children. Resources are of high quality, interesting and well matched to the children's needs. Staff are extremely supportive to all the children and make very timely interventions to extend their learning.

Staff's daily communication with parents is excellent, creating strong and positive relationships. The clear management structure contributes significantly to the excellent organisation of daily routines and the teamwork between staff is outstanding. Following recommendations made at the first accreditation visit, the setting now provides more frequent written observations of children's progress on the web-based recording system for parents, and it continues with the Montessori training of staff whilst endeavouring to recruit more Montessori qualified staff.

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 point for further development:

- continue to train and recruit Montessori staff.

Philosophy:

The Little Learners Montessori Watford provides high quality Montessori education. Staff make learning enjoyable, exciting and challenging for the children. They plan the environment with consideration for each individual child's interests and needs. All the children are given the freedom to develop naturally at their own pace. Staff assiduously "follow the child" and support children in fulfilling their unique potential. Staff place high levels of trust in the children's self-initiated learning and self-discipline, and are nearby when needed. While each room has a specific age group, all the children mix when outdoors and after 16.00. The environment is stimulating and all the children are engaged in learning activities. Children are encouraged to socialise and to respect each other, thereby providing them with the opportunity to grow in confidence, build their independence and increase their concentration. The staff are excellent role models for the children, guiding them in their development, they adapt activities to meet the needs and the abilities of all the children.

The staff are well trained in understanding their role in the setting and in implementing the Montessori principles. The quality of their Montessori practice is regularly reviewed by the managers, who set them weekly development targets. The setting's Montessori principles are defined in writing in the policies, procedures, prospectus and on the website. Discussions take place on the principles, goals and philosophy of the setting during weekly and monthly staff meetings and during in-house Montessori workshops, which take place every term. The management share policies and procedures with staff and parents. Since the first accreditation visit, further written information has been made available to parents on the Montessori approach to education.

Learning and Development:

The learning environment is excellent. All areas of learning are accessible and constantly in use. All the adults have clearly defined roles and their deployment is highly effective in supporting all the children's use of the learning environment, indoors and outdoors, including those under 2 year olds. The organisation of daily routine is thorough, with high levels of supervision of the children, and staff are on hand to present new Montessori materials to the children at opportune moments. The balance between adult-led and child-initiated activity is excellent. The quality of the work cycle for children attending only the afternoon sessions is equivalent to that of the morning sessions. The rhythm of the day for those under 2 years old is clearly defined and child-centred, with high consideration shown for feeding, sleeping and outdoor play routines. The managers are responsible for assessing the overall effectiveness of learning and development in the setting.

The key person is responsible for the observation, assessment and recording of the child's progress and staff plan each area of their room together, based on the interests of their key children. Each room plans separately according to the child's interests, needs and age. Staff are expected to provide at least one observation per week per child. In each classroom, planning documents are on display on the wall and are used by staff to record children's possible next steps. This information is also recorded in the child's Montessori record. Staff record the children's progress, observations and planning on a secure web-based learning journey system. This enables them to have an overview of the child's development and needs, and it is shared with the parents.

The pre-school rooms have three different types of planning. Their individual planning is updated every day following observation of the child and evaluation. Their short term planning is completed weekly and is linked to the Montessori areas of learning and to the learning and development areas of Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). Long term planning is completed termly and focuses on future goals for the group. Staff follow the Montessori method, they make good use of the materials and their written observations are diligently linked to the EYFS areas.

The Montessori work cycle starts at 08.00 when the children arrive and finishes at 16.00. Within the work cycle, the breakfast bar is accessible from 08.00 to 09.00 and lunch is served from 12.00 to 13.00. Throughout the day snack is available for children to help themselves, 16.00 to 16.30 is teatime and 16:30 to 18:00 is free play.

The children are grouped by age, although some children move to the next, older room if they are ready for the extra challenge. The staff support the children to develop positive relationships with peers and adults through a wide range of group activities. Staff promote positive behaviour well and work as role models to reinforce it.

Staff link well the indoor learning opportunities to those outside and provide stimulating Montessori activities in both places. Additional activities on offer are Spanish, Chinese and Yoga. The Spanish lessons are provided by an external company weekly, on a Tuesday at 11.00 and 11.30, and are of 30 minutes duration and available to toddlers and pre-school children. Children who do not wish to participate use the outdoor area. The Chinese lessons are on offer in both the pre-school rooms, provided by staff in the setting. Children spontaneously join the teacher for these. Staff also offer yoga spontaneously throughout the week.

Adjustments are regularly made to the environment to ensure every child benefits from their time at the setting and develops towards their full potential. Staff have a good understanding of the needs of children with SEND and plan around their needs and interests. The SENCO, key persons and parents work very closely together to support the child and they seek external support as necessary. The parents of children with EAL provide key words that enable communication with the child. Dual language books and printed key words in the different languages are on offer in the child's room. Thorough procedures are implemented effectively for managing all children's needs.

Prepared Environment: resources and materials

The building has been purposefully refurbished as a Montessori nursery. Its four distinct rooms meet the needs of each of the age groups. All the resources, including furniture, are suited to the child's size and are made ready for them to use. Natural resources and Montessori materials are available in all areas of the environment. The equipment is at the child's level and they have the freedom to work with any activity at any time. The layout and organisation of the environment is exceptionally good, with excellent accessibility to resources, and it is ordered in relation to the different areas of learning. Both indoors and outdoors, the resources are of high quality, complete, clean, appealing and linked to the interests of the children. In each room they are age appropriate, sufficient for the number of children attending, and there is ample space to use them.

The large outdoor space is set out in two distinct parts and enables all the children to develop good physical skills. The babies use the 'blue area', however, any child can join them. This area is covered, which gives all the children the opportunity to spend time outdoors regardless of the weather. The wide range of outdoor activities supports the children's development and complements well the indoor classroom. The children fully benefit from both.

All the rooms have home corners that can also accommodate children who wish to sleep, and the baby room has its own separate room for sleeping which is also used for sensory activities. Meals are consumed in the classrooms. Staff prepare and maintain the environment to a high standard to enable children to use it fully and the children actively help, such as by clearing up and putting away cutlery, glasses and plates after lunch. Staff conduct an annual review to help assess the whole environment and effect improvement. All the rooms have CCTV and an intercom system.

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

The independence of the children is exceptionally well fostered. Staff trust the children to learn spontaneously, creating a natural learning environment in which the children have opportunities to repeat activities of interest and play individually. The children explore freely and choose their work independently, focusing on their tasks and developing their skills, or they participate in group activities. They have the freedom to choose to work with a wide range of activities and are guided by staff to choose appropriate materials to meet their interest and development. The freedom of movement offered enables the children to decide where to spend their time, in the classroom or outside in the garden. To prepare to go to the garden, children are guided to dress independently. The staff demonstrate how to put shoes and coats on and they encourage the children to try to do this by themselves. The staff talk to the children about their self-care, including washing their hands, cleaning their noses and washing their faces, to encourage independence.

Staff are skilled at re-directing children when appropriate. They teach the children to respect each other and to embrace all cultures and personal differences. Classroom

ground rules are effectively implemented; the children take care of their environment, work together, take turns, are kind to and respect each other's ideas and opinions. Staff teach the children about emotions and how to express themselves. They are excellent role models and give the children opportunities to observe and learn positive behaviour. The children respect the environment by tidying up after themselves and respect the materials, treating them in an appropriate way. The children help the staff to prepare the environment and to make materials, which enables them to feel that the activities are more personal for them. Children are invited to help to fix materials if they are damaged. During mealtimes, the children self-serve their food and the staff encourage the children to use cutlery safely and with confidence. Snacks are accessible so the children eat fruit whenever they wish and are able to prepare it independently.

Staff introduce parents to the Montessori method on their initial visit and throughout the year Montessori workshops enable parents to become familiar with the children's activities. Parents receive daily verbal feedback and ideas on how to encourage their children to be more independent while at home. Staff value a consistent approach between the nursery and home environments in order to further build children's confidence and independence.

Montessori Practice: links with parents, including reports and records

The links with parents are highly effective because of, for example, the quality of the daily exchange of information regarding children's well-being and care routines. Parents receive monthly newsletters electronically and copies are on display in the setting. Several events are organised each year for parents to attend, including information on the Montessori approach. The role of key person is to plan for their key children, record observations and communicate progress with parents. Parents meet the child's key person prior to their starting date to enable bonding with the child and the family members and so ensure a smooth transition from home to nursery. Parent conferences are offered once a term to meet with the key person and discuss their children's progress, needs and planning, and there is an open door policy for parents to discuss points regarding development at any time. Parents receive reports and the mandatory two-year-old progress check. Staff update the children's learning journals weekly, and since the first accreditation visit, these have been closely monitored to ensure parents receive a weekly update. The nursery celebrates world festivals and invites the parents to join and talk to the children about their culture, for example, Christmas and Diwali. Additional involvement for parents include Montessori workshops, Mother's Day celebrations, cheese and wine events and a summer concert.

Staff: qualifications, deployment, and performance management

The organisational structure and leadership of the nursery is clear and robust. The arrangement of staff's responsibilities is highly effective to provide for children's well-being. Procedures are in place for carrying out daily checks. All policies and procedures are overseen and reviewed annually by the higher management team with the Manager.

A development plan includes the ambition to provide further training for staff in the Montessori approach and to employ more Montessori trained staff in the future. Each room has weekly staff meetings and once a month there is a team meeting with all the staff members. The setting is the training centre for the group of nurseries. It provides Montessori training at both its monthly staff meetings and as and when a need arises within the setting.

Induction procedures are thorough and include bespoke online questions pertinent to the setting. The management team is very supportive of staff and continues to pursue leadership training, Montessori workshops and training on the web-based recording system.

Appraisals are annual and all the staff have job descriptions. A meeting room is accessible to all the staff and is used to share confidential information and for the staff to talk to a senior member of the team. Supervision meetings take place every six to eight weeks with each member of staff. The lead practitioner for the pre-school and for the baby room complete the supervisions and the Manager completes the senior staff members' supervisions. Peer observations are completed before the supervisions. All the staff members observe each other, which enables them to reflect on their practice and support each other in developing further their knowledge and skills. The teamwork is excellent and staff's dedication to implementing the Montessori approach is strong.

Name of Assessor: Anne McConway

Date of first visit: 18th January 2019

Date of second visit: 1st April 2019

Date report submitted: First visit – 22nd January 2019

Second visit – 2nd April 2019