



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” (2008) and subsequent 2012 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.

Little Sponges Montessori

38a Hyde Vale, Greenwich, London SE10 8QH

Date of the first re-accreditation visit: 13 February 2014

Date of second re-accreditation visit: 11 June 2014

Date of previous MEAB accreditation: June 2011

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

Description of the school

Little Sponges Montessori is situated in a detached house in a residential area of Greenwich. The nursery occupies the entire premises which comprise, on the ground floor, an open-plan, large room that leads onto a conservatory with access to a raised and partly covered, decked outdoor play area. Beyond the decking is an enclosed garden, which has a small brick building used for play and storage, and a pebbled path leading to a grassed area. There is a kitchen to one side of the main play room and children have access to one ground floor toilet with hand washing facilities available for their use. On the first floor there is a staff/parent meeting room, an office, a staff/parent bathroom and a sensory room for the children.

The nursery operates two sessions daily from Monday to Friday during term time; morning sessions run from 9:30 to 12:00 and afternoon sessions are from 12:30 to 15:00. Children attend for a variety of sessions. There are 41 children enrolled. Of these, 24 are under three years of age. The number of children attending on the day of the second re-accreditation visit was 12 per session. Those staying for both sessions bring packed lunches.

Provision is made for children with special educational needs and for those with English as an additional language. Little Sponges Montessori opened in 2007 as registered home-based care and became a registered nursery in September 2010.



There are three members of teaching staff, including the owner/manager, all of whom are Montessori qualified and work full time.

Summary

In this welcoming, caring learning environment, Little Sponges Montessori offers the children wide ranging and stimulating activities. Staff practice in this setting is exceptionally good and children enjoy their learning. High levels of respect are in evidence and care is taken when settling children into the nurturing environment of the nursery. The setting's aim is to offer each child the highest quality care and education; this is achieved through the carefully prepared environment in which the adults guide each child in developing confidence, self-esteem and independence. Relationships are excellent, with high levels of trust between the staff and the children in evidence. The staff members are excellent role models for the children. The exceptionally high quality and wide ranging resources enable children to develop a wide range of skills and language for communication.

The partnership with parents is strong and they are very happy with all aspects of the setting, particularly the quality of daily feedback from staff and the recently introduced web-based reporting system for planning, observation and assessment. Opportunities are available through planned group activities and the high quality resources to promote an understanding of diversity.

The staff are enthusiastic, dedicated and committed to providing an educational setting which is warm and homely for the children and their families. The consistent approach to daily routines by the Montessori qualified staff, their effective evaluation of all aspects of their work, and their evident commitment to on-going professional development help ensure that children's learning is very well supported. Since the first re-accreditation visit the staff job descriptions have been reviewed, children are given time to put on their own coats before going home and to wash up after snack and lunch. The recommendations from the previous MEAB accreditation, to continue to facilitate the full work-cycle, both indoors and outdoors, and to introduce peer observation, have been met.

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:

- To provide children with the opportunity to choose the time of their snack in order to lengthen the work cycle.
- To consider the use of china crockery for children to use for snack.

Philosophy:

Little Sponges staff achieve their aim which is to offer each child the highest quality of care and education in a carefully prepared and stimulating homely environment. Their goal, to follow each child's interests and make their learning experiences positive and enjoyable, is consistently well implemented. Adults value each child as a unique individual and are sensitive to their



needs, thus allowing them to develop at their own pace. Staff trust the children to make choices and provide ample opportunities for the development of self-initiated learning and self-discipline. Adults promote children's independence, responsibility and respect through consistency of routines.

Staff have a good understanding of their role in the implementation of Montessori principles. The aims and philosophy are defined in writing on their website and in information given to staff and parents, together with detailed newsletters that help promote understanding of their goals and philosophy. There is a plethora of information on the Montessori approach accessible to parents in the entrance hall. All staff are committed to the Montessori ethos and review practice periodically during staff meetings.

Learning and Development:

Planning, observation and assessment is a significant strength of this enriching environment. Learning is organised by following each child's interests and through the presentation of the Montessori materials, with links made to the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) framework in planning, recording and assessment. All the staff know the children well and follow their interests in the presentation of Montessori materials. A digital, web-based Montessori software programme is in use to plan for and to track each child's learning and development. The arrangements to secure the confidentiality of these records are set out in a policy. Staff monitor children's progress through daily observation, planning and evaluation of the activities and during the regular weekly formal staff meeting and the informal daily discussions before the start of the day, which enable adults to fully assess the effectiveness of their learning and development provision. Long and short-term plans for the topics that relate to the children's interests are drawn up half-termly for both indoors and outdoors, and these are linked to the EYFS.

The balance of adult-led and child-initiated activities is good and staff are readily accessible to support and guide children in their learning and development. Children acquire skills and knowledge while they have freedom to explore both indoors and outdoors during a work cycle of almost two and a half hours. The staff enjoy teaching the children and high levels of interaction occur throughout the day. Children listen attentively as staff read them books of their choice, either individually or in small, spontaneously formed groups. Staff introduce the children to underwater creatures through models, pictures and through observing fish in the fish tank. To further develop their understanding children were observed, during the second re-accreditation visit, experimenting with objects to discover whether they floated or sank and staff later demonstrated a waterfall in the garden. Children's levels of concentration were seen to be excellent as they grate nutmeg and cocoa.

Children's additional needs are very well met as staff give great attention to the details which parents provide and incorporate them routinely in the classroom. Furthermore, staff attend training as necessary and have the benefit of a designated SENCo as well as support from the local authority's Area SENCo. Additionally, the setting has a range of resources including visual timetables and dual-language books to support children with additional needs/difficulties. Adults use house rules to promote positive behaviour in a calm environment. The mandatory two year old assessment is prepared and used for sharing with parents. The role of the adults is to link the child to the environment in a constructive manner.



Prepared Environment: resources and materials

The layout of this aesthetically pleasing classroom is carefully planned to provide easy access to all the exceptionally high quality learning resources that are provided in each of the areas of learning. The range of resources and materials are suitable for the developmental needs of the children who attend. Resources are in order, complete, clean and appealing to the children. The Montessori materials are systematically set out on low shelving cabinets in the areas of learning. Indoors children enjoy a book corner, sensory room, and an art and craft area. Outside children are turn-taking and sharing on the decked area and in the garden, where activities such as sand/water/mud play, painting, construction, malleable, gardening, science activities, mark-making, climbing and messy play are available. A small building at the end of the garden is used imaginatively by the children for the development of play and skills such as ironing, hanging clothes and dressing up. Indoors there is a large, wall-mounted fish tank with an interesting range of fish species, which staff use effectively to develop children's knowledge of underwater life.

The quantity and quality of accessible, open-ended resources make this an attractive environment for the children. Sufficient space is available for children to use them on tables or on the floor. The role of the adults is to carefully prepare and maintain the environment to enable children to access the numerous, stimulating and meaningful learning experiences which are on offer.

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

Staff foster the children's independence by allowing them freedom of choice and movement during the work-cycle in both the morning and afternoon. Adults follow the child's interests and trust them to access learning spontaneously both indoors and outdoors. Children respect the Montessori materials and are happy to help each other. Parents receive information on how to complement independence at home, for example, by allowing the children to put on their coats and using velcro straps on shoes to allow the child to be able to remove them. At mealtimes in the nursery children pour their own drinks, lay the table, clear up afterwards, sweep and mop up spills. Children are given time to wash their hands and prepare their place, and, since the first re-accreditation visit more time is allowed for them to clear up after lunch and to complete their snack by washing up at their own pace. Since the first visit children are also now encouraged, at the end of each session, to put on their coats in their own time.

This is a very carefully prepared environment designed to facilitate the development of the children's independence and personal empowerment. Staff encourage the children to take responsibility for the care of their environment in a purposeful and calm manner, which fosters socialisation and cohesion of the group as a whole. Children show respect for each other, the adults and the materials. Adults provide a range of small and large group activities in which children may choose to participate.



Montessori practice: Classroom management

Children are frequently introduced to materials, either individually or in a group, through presentations. All staff work with all the children and move about the setting to meet the needs of the children. Adults are consistently extending the children's learning through open-ended questions and the promotion of critical thinking skills, both indoors and outdoors. Children's learning occurs spontaneously and naturally both indoors and out, and the adults are clear that it is their role to enhance and support them at every opportunity and to extend their understanding of the world. Classroom procedures are written for staff and their designated responsibilities are on display for parents. Daily team discussions ensure that planning, recording and assessment are highly organised and staff observe the children daily.

The work-cycle is almost two and a half hours and includes short, adult-led group sessions of greetings, news, singing, music and dancing at the beginning and end of the session; these do not require the participation of the whole group attending as the children are offered the freedom to choose not to join groups if they wish to do another activity instead. However, the work cycle does have a snack time for all the children to eat together, which staff consider to be an opportunity for children to learn and develop social skills and manners. Children spontaneously collect a place mat, cup and plate and take them to a table to sit down for meals. Staff model socialisation skills as they sit down with the children and take every opportunity to provide guidance and knowledge to support language and communication skills. Since the first re-accreditation visit the opportunities for the completion of this cycle of activity have been improved through the provision of washing up facilities for the children to wash their cups and plates afterwards and pack away their own lunch boxes after lunch. It is recommended that the setting now considers replacing the plastic crockery with china. It is also recommended that the length of the work cycle is extended by giving children the choice of time to have their snack. The afternoon work-cycle follows the same pattern as the morning session.

A good mix of adult-led and child-initiated activities is available. The mixed aged classroom enables the new children to learn exemplary behaviour from older children. A large, wide sofa in the classroom is available to accommodate sleeping arrangements for children. When the upstairs rooms are in use staff understand that they need to ensure that sufficient children are taken upstairs to maintain ratios in all rooms. Staff perform daily checks on the premises. Policies are reviewed annually and procedures are discussed at daily staff meetings.

Montessori Practice: links with parents, including reports and records

Relationships with parents are robust and they have easy access to photos of their child involved in activities in the nursery, as well as to individual observations, planning, assessment and next steps in their learning. Staff provide high quality feedback to parents on a daily basis and this effective communication is much valued and appreciated by them. Parents may make appointments to discuss the learning and development of their child throughout the year and receive a written report following a parents evening at the end of the summer term. Though there is a key person system, parents are welcome to choose to speak with any of the staff. Adults write the mandatory two year old progress check and a transition report when children move to another setting or into primary school.

Parents may enter the classroom at the beginning and end of each session to speak with staff and familiarize themselves with the materials. Feedback is always on offer and may be



complemented by guidance on how the child may be supported at home. The nursery prospectus provides helpful information on the Montessori ethos, the school day and some policies. A notice board in the hallway displays the daily routine, key persons, designated responsibilities of staff, and other useful information for parents including the promotion of Montessori publications.

Staffing:

The leadership and management have a clear organizational structure, with responsibilities designated to staff members. A clear induction process, together with annual staff appraisals, supervision and peer observations help ensure the continued effectiveness of the staff to offer high quality provision. Since the last re-accreditation visit the staff job descriptions have been reviewed and updated. The owner/manager is very enthusiastic regarding continuous professional development of the staff and provides good opportunities for them to attend training, which is recorded and evaluated for its effectiveness.

Weekly staff meetings review routines and procedures of the setting and also include planning and monitoring of children's progress. Termly meetings also focus on procedures and matters relating to safeguarding. Both sets of meetings are minuted. The owner works full time in the nursery with the children and the teamwork is excellent. All the staff are full time and Montessori qualified, enthusiastic and are wholly committed to the implementation of all Montessori principles.

Name of Assessor: Anne McConway

Date of reports: First visit – 15.02.2014

Second visit – 11.06.2014