



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. 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 CSSIW (Wales) which reports separately. Also the report does not provide any assessment of financial aspects of the school.

The Children's Room Montessori Nursery School

13 St. James Gardens, Uplands, Swansea, South Wales SA1 6DY

Date of first re-accreditation visit: 29 July 2013

Date of second re-accreditation visit: 11 November 2013

Date of previous MEAB accreditation: July 2010

This accreditation report relates to the provision for children aged 3 months to 6 years.

Description of the school

The Children's Room is situated in a Victorian house in a residential area of Uplands, Swansea. The nursery section (for children aged between 2½ to 6 years) is on the ground floor and comprises three rooms, one of which has an outside area where pet rabbits, a sand pit and a play house are situated. There is a small kitchen in which lunches are warmed and snacks are prepared. The cloakroom includes toilets and basins, which are opposite an area for coats. On the first floor are two large rooms for the babies, aged 18 months and under. On the second floor two rooms accommodate the toddlers, aged 18 months to over two. On the third floor there is an office. There is a bathroom on every floor, and a staff room and kitchen on the first floor. Communal public gardens are located directly opposite the nursery and these are used on a regular basis.

The nursery offers places from 08.00 to 18.00 on Monday to Friday, 48 weeks of the year. Parents have the option of choosing term time or full time. There is a minimum attendance of two sessions per week, taken as half days or as full days. Many of those over 3 years old also attend state nurseries in the morning or afternoon, and are transported to and from these schools by car, by members of the Children's Room staff.

Seventy-seven children are enrolled; four attend full time and 63 part time. Of these, 22 are babies, 18 are toddlers and 37 are of nursery age. The maximum number of children attending on the day of the second re-accreditation visit was 38, with many staying for the full day. Those that stay over the lunch period bring packed lunches from home, which are heated as required by staff in the kitchen.



Support is provided for children with special educational needs and for those with English as an additional language. The Children's Room opened in 2007 under the present ownership. There are 11 members of staff, all of whom work full time and who hold a range of Montessori, NVQ, ILM and BTEC qualifications.

Summary

The Children's Room team provides a warm, welcoming learning environment consistent with the Montessori approach. Their philosophy to nurture each child both intellectually and emotionally in a calm and happy environment is fully implemented. The carefully planned layout of the rooms provides spacious areas for all children to move about freely and choose their activities. There are almost equal numbers of children aged under and over 3 years on the roll. Those over 3 years show a positive attitude to learning and high levels of involvement with Montessori resources. Children under that age are provided with a caring and secure environment. Practice is reflective, a recent change being the introduction of Welsh language sessions, for which high quality resources have been acquired, and improvements are made frequently, some of the recent ones being a new non-slip path, and a shed to store pushchairs and prams. The full potential of the resources are effectively used to enable children to enjoy their experience and develop language and social skills. A website provides parents with a realistic view of the setting and its outstanding provision.

Excellent teamwork amongst the staff helps ensure the efficient organisation of planning to provide stimulating daily activities for the children. Respect for others is paramount within the setting and all staff members are excellent role models for the children.

Links with parents are robust and daily communication is in person or through a home-nursery book. Newcomers are settled in well: this is thoughtfully planned and meticulously implemented. The ratio of staff to children is high, thus ensuring the babies and toddlers receive all the attention that they need. Staff are dedicated to providing a Montessori approach to the care and education of all the children.

Significant expansion of the provision has taken place since the previous MEAB accreditation, when it operated only from the ground floor and the age range for children started at 2 years. The under 2 years facility opened in September 2011 and helps to provide a smooth, gradual transfer to the nursery rooms. In addition, a transportation service is now in place for children aged 3 and older who also attend state nurseries so that these children can also access this high quality, additional learning opportunity. This service is much appreciated by parents.

The recommendations from the previous MEAB accreditation to promote the three hour work cycle, to review assessment and planning and to reflect on the layout of the curriculum areas have been implemented well. Since the first re-accreditation visit a high quality booklet of nursery protocol for staff has been produced, termly staff observations by the managers have been introduced, and clear responsibilities for actions are indicated on the record of staff meeting minutes. A new school prospectus has also been prepared, with a section for providing guidance to parents on how to support their children at home

The school provides an education in accordance with the principles of the Montessori approach and environment and merits accreditation by the Montessori Evaluation and Accreditation Board.



- It is recommended that the school continues to reflect on its practice in order to ensure that high standards are maintained.

Philosophy:

The Children's Room's philosophy is to nurture each child both intellectually and emotionally in a calm, happy, trusting environment through a child-led approach, across the entire age range. They achieve their aim; the children are shown respect and given the opportunity to develop at their own pace. All staff are committed to making the Children's Room experience a positive one. The staff are outstanding role models for the children. A positive language policy works effectively throughout the nursery and new staff are provided with clear guidance on how to speak to the children.

The educational principles of the nursery are outlined in the prospectus and mission statement, while the website provides a clear picture of the setting with concise, relevant information about the Montessori approach.

The setting embraces diversity, celebrates many festivals from around the world and has a very broad cultural programme. Staff welcome and encourage parents and family members into the nursery to talk about their backgrounds. A settling-in period is well managed to help each family adjust to nursery life when they join. Staff work with sensitivity to help ensure that the needs of each child to explore and repeat activities are respected. They constantly review processes and procedures.

Learning and Development:

Positive interaction between staff and children indicates high levels of trust. Reassurance is readily available for all children. The environment is conducive to child-led learning as everything in the rooms is accessible to, and suitable for, the children. Their levels of concentration are outstanding. The staff follow the Montessori curriculum and operate a key person system whereby every member of staff is allocated several children and has responsibility for keeping records and identifying the next stage of the child's development. Achievements and progress are recorded and transferred to the child's Montessori checklist by the key person, along with photographs taken of them. Observations are kept in the child's record folder. Each child has an art book and their high quality work is put in throughout the year so that the standards and achievements can be seen. These include a range of painting techniques, collages, and block printing.

Short-term planning for the setting is compiled at staff meetings and takes into account the ages of the children and recent topics. A display board features a book with extension exercises around the theme: this offers appropriate challenges for the children.

The ground floor for the 2½ to 6 year olds is organized by the Montessori areas of learning, with creative activities freely accessible for the children. The first classroom houses the practical life and sensorial apparatus, the second classroom has a book corner, resources for creativity, water play and art work, while the third classroom has mathematics, language and cultural materials. The children in each age range have access to all rooms on their floor except during the lunchtime period and the last half hour of the day. Staff move around the rooms on each



floor rather than being allocated to specific areas.

The work cycle is three and a half hours each session, and staff enable the children to make excellent use of all the resources. At 11.40, when some additional children arrive, the second nursery classroom and culture room are used for singing, story or other activities.

The children on the first and second floors are taken to the park opposite the nursery on a regular basis to observe nature and enjoy planned outdoor activities. The children on the ground floor have free flow access to the garden.

Teaching is principally through the English language with some Welsh provision. All areas of learning are covered well and the setting works effectively with Swansea Council for Voluntary Services to support children with additional needs. Training has also been provided for staff to support children with special needs.

Staff evaluate effectively the learning and development provision and provide new resources, for example the mole hole (tunnel) for babies to crawl through. When a music teacher comes in, all children have the opportunity to participate in the lesson for their age group, though this is their choice. On Monday mornings a movement and dance teacher provides guidance to all the children who wish to participate in this planned activity. Adults are highly effective in supporting the children's learning.

Prepared Environment: resources and materials

This is an immaculately clean, uncluttered environment where children have the freedom to move and play on wooden and carpeted flooring. Resources in all rooms are age appropriate, accessible, orderly, attractive and of good quality. Close attention has been given to quality and safety, and suitable low wooden chairs and tables are provided in sufficient quantity for all the children. The layout of the rooms for all ages is consistently outstanding. The range of resources includes a full set of Montessori materials organized by Montessori curriculum areas, in very good condition and appropriate to the developmental needs of the children who attend.

The physical development needs of the children are extended through the use of the secure walled garden and the fenced public gardens opposite, which are used extensively for observation of nature and exploration of plant life. It was noted at the second re-accreditation visit that a hamster had been brought into the nursery for a week in order that children could learn how to care for it. In addition, crickets and other insects are housed in secure, transparent tanks so that children may observe their movements and behaviour. The outdoor walled garden with its decked area provides children with direct access to a water tray, building blocks, child sized brushes for sweeping up, and a planting area; these activities help foster social skills such as sharing and taking turns. Snack is taken outside when weather permits. The garden is the focus of a 'sustainability through creativity' recycling project.

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

The morning session starts at 08.00 for the entire age range, with the children being personally greeted by staff. Those over 2½ years hang up their coats and bags and give their lunch to a



member of staff to put in the kitchen. They remove their shoes, putting them in their tray and put on their slippers; ample time is allocated for this activity in order to promote independence. If they want to go outside, children self-register this choice by taking a necklace, as only six children are permitted outside at any one time this helps develop turn-taking skills. Staff working with the other age groups encourage independence by guiding children to remove shoes and coats on arrival and choosing from accessible activities throughout the day. Staff demonstrate great respect for the children through attentiveness to their needs and gentle guidance in their role of modeling of communication

Snack time in the morning for all children starts at around 10.00 and it is sometimes taken to the park. Snack is a part of the work cycle and the children help themselves to toast, bananas, milk and water. They butter their own toast and pour their own drinks from glass jugs as soon as they are ready to do so, though a member of staff is on hand, sensitively observing and ready to offer help. Children's independence is further promoted by washing up after themselves, deciding which room they want to be in, choosing their own resources and returning them to the correct place on the shelves.

An open door policy for parents operates and they show an interest in, and are supportive of, their children doing things independently – for example putting shoes and coats on and pouring drinks. Staff receive encouraging feedback from parents on how independent their children are becoming.

The three and a half hour work cycle in both the morning and afternoon for all three age groups enables children to have plenty of time to choose which room to be in on their floor and with whom they wish to be. Each room is set out according to the activities provided but all are arranged with regard for Montessori principles, for example, children in the nursery room on the ground floor predominantly work on the floor mats with literacy and numeracy Montessori resources, while in the practical activities room they work at small tables positioned in the centre of the room. The children respect their environment by returning resources to the shelves where they have found them.

In the babies' and toddlers' rooms treasure baskets and practical activities are accessible to children to develop useful skills. Babies have individual care routines agreed with parents and lunch is a collective activity for each age group at which they eat food prepared at home.

Montessori practice: Classroom management

Daily morning briefings and regular staff meetings facilitate the setting's aim to constantly improve. For the children aged 2½ to 6 years, situated on the ground floor, the work cycle starts at 8.00 and finishes at approximately 11.40 when singing and story time is offered in preparation for some children arriving and others leaving. Lunch time commences at 12.00 and children usually have around 40 minutes to eat their lunch, after which they look at a book until 13.00. While some children are being collected by parents, others are being taken by staff to state nurseries. At 13.00 the afternoon work cycle begins during which the children once again have access to the full range of resources provided.

On the first floor the 3 to 18 month old children each have a key person who is responsible for monitoring their needs, record keeping and observations, but any member of staff on this floor will share the care of this age group as necessary.



Those in the age group 18 months up to 2½ years are on the second floor of the building, where the same meticulous care routine applies as with the babies. The key person system is also in operation here for record keeping and observations.

All the children are able to sleep when they want to; cosy, moveable beds are provided on both upper floors as required and the remaining children who are not sleeping participate in choosing activities in the adjoining rooms.

Staff in the nursery on the ground floor rotate between all the rooms and make notes on any child's records according to the observations that they make. Classroom routines are well known to all staff and are displayed. All staff working with each age group contribute to each child's welfare and development as they interact with all the children within that age group. Staff implement the policies and procedures effectively.

Montessori Practice: links with parents, including reports and records

The open door policy operates effectively for parents and formal meetings are arranged if requested. Newsletters are sent out regularly and staff give verbal feedback at the end of the session.

At the end of the summer term the children take home a short report and their art books. In the babies' room a note book system works effectively and is well used, this goes home with the child every night for communication with parents. Record keeping is the responsibility of the child's key person and works very well, though the setting is currently in the process of introducing an electronic system of record keeping that will further enhance communications with parents. Good communication is maintained with external agencies.

Parents speak highly of the quality of communication and the accessibility of the staff to provide them with information on their child's day. A prospectus has been produced to give an overview of policies and procedures, daily routines and – since the first re-accreditation visit – this includes a section on how independence may be extended in the home. Parents evenings are hosted to give an overview of the Montessori philosophy and of the daily life in the nursery. A copy of the 'Learning Together' Montessori publication is available for parents to borrow, which provides them with further information on how children develop. Throughout the year social gatherings are also organized for parents.

Staffing:

The leadership and management are visionary and robust; they inspire the staff team, which is dedicated to providing a positive and happy environment for the children. The staffing structure is clearly recorded and teamwork is excellent. The owner provides a daily ten minute briefing for staff working with each age group. The induction process for new staff is thorough in practice and, since the first re-accreditation visit, is now supported by a written procedure in the form of a booklet of nursery protocol for staff. This has extensive, clear and explicit advice such as on how to speak to the children using positive language. Job descriptions for staff are regularly reviewed. Brief appraisals take place monthly and feed into the annually recorded appraisal.



High importance is accorded to training and updating of skills; staff travel widely to access Montessori training. Senior managers observe staff and, since the first re-accreditation visit, they are recording their findings as well as details of who has responsibility for actions following staff meetings.

The setting is run by the Montessori qualified owner who works with the children, and is supported by ten members of staff, all of whom are full time and early years' qualified; they provide high levels of care and continuity for the children. Four of the staff hold the Montessori International Diploma, four are also qualified to degree level, while one holds an NVQ4, one an ILM, one a HND2, three hold NVQ3 and 1 holds an NVQ2. The peripatetic music teacher has a BA Movement RAD.

The leaders and other staff are fully committed to the Montessori approach for all age groups in the setting and endeavour to continue to provide high standards of care and education for the children

Name of Assessor: Anne McConway

Date of reports: First visit – 6 August 2013

Second visit – 11 November 2013