

## **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 CSSIW (Care and Social Service Inspectorate Wales), 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.

### **The Children’s Room Montessori Nursery School**

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

Date of previous MEAB accreditation: December 2013

Date of first reaccreditation visit: March 3 2017

Date of second reaccreditation visit: June 26 2017

This accreditation is valid until December 2021

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

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

The Children’s Room Montessori Nursery School is open Monday to Friday, from 08.00 to 18.00, for 48 weeks of the year. Children can attend either on a full-time basis or term time only (40 weeks). It closes for one week at Christmas, one week at Easter and for the last two weeks of August. Some older children attend the setting in the morning and go to school in the afternoon, or vice versa. The nursery liaises with the schools about the children as staff members who are supernumerary assist in dropping off or picking children up from their schools.

The nursery is privately owned and was first registered by the current owner in October

2007. It occupies a large terraced building in a residential area of Swansea. The 'Nursery', which accommodates children from 2 to 6 years, is located on the ground floor, where there is a large entrance hall, three classrooms, a kitchen and children's cloakroom area. There is access to the garden from one of the classrooms. On a mezzanine level is a staff room and nappy changing facilities. The first floor has two rooms for toddlers aged approximately 18 months to 2 years and is known as 'Rupert Floor'. The babies are accommodated across two rooms on the second floor, known as 'Tess Bear', with a utility room adjacent. The third floor is solely used as an office, with additional bathroom facilities on the same level. The basement provides storage for resources.

The nursery is registered for 47 children at any time. There are currently 37 children under 2 years on roll, 29 children aged 2 years, and 25 children aged 3 to 5 years. On the day of the second reaccreditation visit, 42 children attended in the morning, of whom 17 were under 2 years. Thirty-eight children attended in the afternoon, of whom 16 were under 2. All children bring in packed lunches, which are kept chilled. These lunches may include food which needs to be heated in the nursery's kitchen. For morning snack children are offered buttered wholemeal toast, with either milk or water. Snack in the afternoon is usually fresh fruit or vegetables.

The Children's Room Montessori Nursery School benefits from a well-qualified staff team. In addition to the Montessori qualified and experienced owner, 13 staff work directly with the children, two of whom have Montessori diplomas, one with an Honours degree in Early Years. Two other members of staff have relevant degrees and a further member is a qualified Early Years Teacher. One has a level 2 qualification and the remaining members of staff are qualified to level 3 or above. Those working with children under two years old are suitably qualified and experienced. Five of the team work part-time. Each of the three age ranges is overseen by a Room Leader and there is a nursery manager who deputises for the owner in her absence. The setting welcomes work experience students. Its inclusive admissions policy is used to welcome children for whom English is an additional language (including Welsh-speaking families) and children with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

## Summary

The Children's Room Montessori Nursery School demonstrates commitment to the Montessori principle of 'following the child' at most times throughout the day. Across all age groups, children are treated with courtesy and respect as they freely choose their activities and move between their rooms during the morning and afternoon work cycles.

There are many high quality and age-appropriate resources, which together provide children with very good opportunities to extend their learning across the curriculum. Following the previous MEAB accreditation, a web-based recording and assessment system was adopted for the 'Nursery' and, following a recommendation made at the first reaccreditation visit, its use has now been extended to the 'Rupert Floor'. This is

used securely to plan for and record children's progress effectively in both these age groups. The owner and her team reflect on their practice to help ensure that high standards are maintained and that the Montessori ethos is understood and followed. Following the first visit they have made progress with their review of the Montessori prepared environment and are continuing to reflect on other points for action recommended on the first visit.

***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:***

- staff members should continue to deepen their knowledge of the Montessori curriculum and materials and gain recognised Montessori qualifications, in order to further strengthen the nursery's ethos and practice; and
- the team should continue to review the organisation of the daily routines, in particular those for lunchtimes and for access to the outdoors, in order to further promote children's independence and free choice.

#### **Philosophy:**

The Montessori philosophy is highlighted within the setting's Statement of Purpose and prospectus, and on its website. Children benefit from vertical age-grouping in the 'Nursery', and they enjoy free-flow between the three ground floor classrooms, choosing their activities and who they want to work with throughout most of the day. Those on the other floors also enjoy freedom of choice in their areas. The adults support children to complete their cycles of activity. For example, during the first reaccreditation visit one child was reminded to return to pack away a train track, whilst in another room a member of staff helped a child to return the Montessori number rods after use.

The owner and the two other Montessori qualified staff assist with in-house training in the Montessori approach and in explaining the cornerstones of Montessori philosophy to the whole team. Staff members are also encouraged to attend regional Montessori workshops. However, more of the team should consider gaining Montessori qualifications in order to deepen their understanding and to enhance the practice, for example in promoting more outdoor learning for the younger children.

Across the whole setting the adults are positive role models as they support children calmly and respectfully. In the 'Tess Bear' group, an adult showed great respect in asking a toddler if they had finished their lunch, accepting their decision. Children are encouraged to respond respectfully to each other in a similar manner. One child was overheard to say to another 'I'm going to put this away now. Would you like to have it after I'm finished?' Clearly, courtesy and respect for others is a way of life at The Children's Room Montessori Nursery School.

### **Learning and Development:**

The morning work cycle for children in the 'Nursery' group begins at 08.00 and runs until approximately 11.25. Children move freely between each of the three rooms, choosing their activities, working 1:1 with an adult, with a friend or in a small group. At some point during the morning children access the well-resourced, walled rear garden. Children in this group also have safe access to a delightful park, which is directly opposite the setting. Snack time is part of the work cycle and provides an opportunity for developing skills for independence, as children serve themselves and tidy up afterwards.

Those in the 'Tess Bear' and 'Rupert Floor' groups move freely between the two rooms on their floors throughout both morning and afternoon sessions, engaging in play activities from the time they arrive. The adults follow their individual sleeping and feeding routines, working in partnership with parents to achieve this. These babies and toddlers enjoy a very calm, unhurried and nurturing environment. However, currently they do not have as much choice to use the garden as those in the 'Nursery', which limits their opportunities for outdoor learning and fresh air. It is recommended that the organisation of their daily routines is reviewed to allow them more access to the garden.

Between 11.15 and 11.45 children engage in singing, story time, music or yoga, organised within their groups on each floor, as rooms are prepared for lunch. The lunchtime routines for the 'Rupert Floor' and 'Tess Bear' groups are calm, leisurely affairs, with babies and toddlers encouraged to feed themselves. These children rest in comfortable beds or on sleeping mats after lunch. The lunchtime routine in the 'Nursery' takes account of those children who leave to spend the afternoon in their local schools, as well as those children who are arriving, having spent their morning at school. Following the first reaccreditation visit, this routine is now being reviewed in order to improve it and the team is considering making lunch part of a continuous day-long work cycle. After lunch, children here have a choice of quiet activities, including story time. This enables staff members to have their lunch breaks, whilst ensuring children are appropriately supervised. A further work cycle of appropriate length takes place during the afternoon.

Planning takes account of both the Montessori curriculum and the areas of learning within the Early Years Foundation Phase. Across the whole setting, termly topics include themes such as 'Traditional Tales', broken down by staff into weekly, age-appropriate activity planning. On the day of the second visit in the garden children were trying to build with straw, sticks and bricks, linked to 'The Three Little Pigs' story. On the 'Tess Bear' floor the babies were having fun with porridge oats in a builders' tray, using spoons, jugs and bowls for transferring and texture play. Also, an attractive wall display in one of the 'Nursery' rooms had the familiar phrase 'Once Upon A Time...' translated into a range of different languages, including Welsh, Arabic and Igbo (Nigerian).

Each child in the 'Nursery' and 'Rupert Floor' groups has their individual next steps for learning planned by their key person using the web-based recording and assessment system. The key person uploads observations and photographs of the key child's activities and shares these securely with parents on a weekly basis. Planning for each

child in the 'Tess Bear' group is drawn up weekly by the Room Leader and is reviewed during that team's fortnightly 'focus meeting'. Feedback on these children's needs and progress is shared with parents via their Daily Diary.

The nursery has a Welsh language teacher who helps support children for whom Welsh is their first language and also helps foster an awareness of the Welsh language and cultural heritage across the setting. For example, two days before the first visit children and staff had celebrated St David's Day by eating traditional Welsh food, wearing traditional Welsh dress and by displaying vases of daffodils around the setting. Recent role-play activities have also included wearing traditional French clothing, 'shopping' at a French patisserie and eating French foods. On one day each week a peripatetic trained music teacher comes into the setting for group sessions with children in the 'Rupert Floor' and 'Nursery' groups. This gives them an early opportunity to develop a love of music through singing, role-play, and the exploration of musical instruments and concepts. The children are free to choose to join in or not and really enjoy this opportunity.

Following the first visit, the setting's inclusive admissions policy and procedures have been strengthened by the appointment of a designated Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Co-ordinator, who provides targeted support to children with additional needs. Members of the team are well qualified and all have clearly benefitted from in-house Montessori training; however, not all areas of the provision have Montessori qualified staff. Although staff's use of the web-based system provides them with useful guidance regarding the Montessori curriculum, all staff members should be encouraged to broaden their knowledge of the Montessori approach and materials and to gain recognised Montessori qualifications. This would further assist them in organising the daily routines and in planning even more effectively for children's learning and development.

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

Resources throughout the setting are well-maintained, in good condition and are readily available to the children, set mainly on low shelves. They are complete and the adults have easy access to additional materials for when children are ready to be introduced to them.

The 'Tess Bear' floor has two good-sized, light and airy rooms. These are amply resourced for the young children, for example with treasure baskets and soft toys. Sofa seating, low chairs, tables and shelving, help staff provide a comfortable and nurturing environment. However, opportunities for these babies to have regular access to the outdoors are currently limited. Toddlers in the 'Rupert Floor' group are similarly accommodated in two rooms – one spacious room to the front of the house facing the park and a second, smaller room, overlooking the rear garden. Both rooms are well-furnished with appropriate solid wood climbing equipment, soft seating and low shelves, with some early Montessori activities for everyday living and sensorial materials. There are many opportunities for painting, craft and small world activities. On the day of the second visit, children from 'Rupert Floor' enjoyed spending time in the garden during the

latter part of the morning. It is recommended that the daily routines in both 'Tess Bear' and 'Rupert Floor' continue to be reviewed in order that the children here fully benefit from the setting's outdoor provision.

Room One in the 'Nursery' is large, light, airy and attractive. It is very well resourced primarily with Montessori activities for everyday living and sensorial materials. Room Two houses materials for literacy, mathematics and understanding the world. It is smaller and provides free-flow access to the rear garden for children on this floor, weather permitting. Following the first reaccreditation visit, consideration has been given to the layout of the materials in the 'Nursery', particularly in Room Two. These materials are now clearly displayed in curriculum areas, with a logical sequencing that supports children's progression. A recent focus has also been on encouraging children to handle books carefully, including in the book area. Classroom Three, which accommodates art and craft activities, is very well resourced with a wide range of materials for creative experiences. Children also have many opportunities for cooking and baking in this room, which adjoins the setting's kitchen. The 'Nursery' children also have individual trays in this room, with their name and photograph on to store their belongings.

The walled rear garden is well resourced with many opportunities for digging and planting, for weighing natural objects, for mark-making and for care of the setting's two rabbits. The new sand and water trough was a great attraction during the second visit. Outdoor shelving provides an area for a range of practical life activities and netting around a tree enables the older children to begin to take risks in their physical development, with observant staff nearby. The high quality and range of the resources throughout the setting supports children's learning and development very well.

### **Montessori practice: independence**

The setting promotes children's independence well in many aspects of its daily practice. On arrival, children in the 'Nursery' group take off their own shoes and coats, placing their shoes into their named trays in Classroom Three. Packed lunches are given to staff to refrigerate. Snack time is part of the work cycle in the 'Nursery' and children here are encouraged to butter their toast, pour their drink of milk or water and wash up afterwards. During both morning and afternoon work cycles, children here display high levels of independence in terms of choosing their activities and where they want to work. For example, in Classroom Two on the day of the first reaccreditation visit, two children were lying on cushions, talking to each other and looking at books; a member of staff worked 1:1 with a child using the Montessori sandpaper letters and a sand-writing tray. In Classroom One, three children were playing with the train track; two children were working 1:1 with members of staff and one child was totally absorbed in a spontaneously-chosen activity. However, although children help set up the tables, lunchtime arrangements do not yet afford the same opportunities for independence. Following the first visit, the team has begun a review of these arrangements with, for example, the older children being given the responsibility for taking out their own food from their lunch boxes.

The babies and toddlers also have opportunities to develop age-appropriate levels of independence, building their confidence and self-esteem. For example, they are also

encouraged to take off their own shoes, to feed themselves, to choose the toys they want to play with and are able to move between the two rooms on their floor. Through parent meetings, newsletters and the web-based recording and assessment system, parents are encouraged to support their children's growing independence beyond the setting.

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

There is good verbal communication between parents and the Room Leaders and staff who are based on each floor. This promotes positive partnerships between nursery and home. Additionally, parents of the babies receive written feedback via their child's Daily Diary, supported by a brief annual report on their child's progress at the end of the summer term. Scrapbooks containing the artwork of the children in the two younger age groups are compiled and given to parents when children move to the 'Nursery' floor. Key persons on the 'Tess Bear' floor maintain a paper-based record of each child's progress, which is the Developmental Milestones colour-coded chart. This is passed to the next Room Leader when the children move there. A 'Transition Form' (which includes the young child's daily routines, likes and dislikes) is also passed on to the new Room Leader to promote continuity of care. Parents spoken to during both reaccreditation visits were appreciative of the 'open door' policy at the setting, whereby parents are encouraged to request a meeting with staff at any time, should they wish to find out more about their child's daily activities or progress.

Parents of children in both the 'Rupert Floor' and 'Nursery' groups are very pleased with the feedback they receive via the web-based recording and assessment system now being used for these age ranges. As children move into these groups, parents are invited to an initial consultation meeting with the Room Leader. Prior to this meeting, key persons input information onto the web-based system, such as from the child's Developmental Milestones record, so that their starting points can be shared with parents. During this initial meeting the web-based system is explained to parents. The system is then used to provide weekly reports for parents and covers areas of learning within both the Early Years Foundation Phase and the Montessori curriculum. Photographs of children's artwork are uploaded onto the system before children take it home, and staff members encourage parents to upload their own photographs and feedback from home onto the system, via their child's secure online link.

Parent partnership is further supported through regular newsletters and parent events. These have included a well-attended parents evening at the setting where parents were shown videos of children working with the materials. Parent/staff social 'nights out' have also been successfully organised. Parents spoken to on both visits felt valued as partners in their children's learning and development.

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

Overall, the team at The Children's Room Montessori Nursery School is well qualified. Its members have varying levels of childcare and management qualifications ranging

from NVQ Level 2 to a Master's degree. In addition to the owner, two members of staff who work with the 'Nursery' group (one of whom works part-time) have Montessori diplomas.

The adults work effectively as a team. They share information about each child within their group and about planned activities for the day at daily morning 'briefings' and in minuted 'focus meetings' which take place fortnightly. Full staff meetings take place monthly, where in-house training, termly themes and policy developments are discussed. Staff deployment is a real strength of this setting. The Room Leaders keep an overview of staff members' planning and record-keeping for the children and these Leaders are well supported by their individual teams. Although several staff members work either two or three days each week and full-time staff work on four days each week, on the days they work, the adults are in the setting for the full length of the working day from 08.00 to 18.00 and communicate effectively with each other. As a result, parents speak to the same member of staff at the end of the day as at the beginning, when they drop their child off. This allows for continuity of care for the children and good daily verbal communication between parents and each team. Staff members get to know the children and their families very well.

Recent Montessori training has focused on 'the Early Years', 'Positive Language' and 'Montessori Practice – the work cycle and supporting children in all-day provision'. Resulting staff feedback has been enthusiastic. However, it would enhance Montessori practice across the setting if each area of the provision could be led by a Montessori qualified practitioner on any given day. Staff members should be encouraged to deepen their knowledge of the Montessori curriculum and materials and to gain recognised Montessori qualifications, in order to further strengthen the setting's ethos and practice.

All staff members have a full induction when they start and clear job descriptions that include areas of responsibility within their allocated groups. The owner and the nursery manager, both of whom are supernumerary, have an ambitious vision for the setting. They monitor staff performance through classroom observations, appraisals and through staff members' comments and observations of children recorded on the web-based system. Following the first reaccreditation visit, staff supervision sessions have also been introduced. All of these processes contribute to the highly positive team ethos within The Children's Room Montessori Nursery School.

Name of Assessor: Maureen Taylor

Date report submitted: First visit – March 9<sup>th</sup> 2017

Second visit – June 27<sup>th</sup> 2017