

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 Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted), 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 Caterpillar Montessori Nursery

St. Albans Church Hall, South Parade, London W4 5LG

Date of previous MEAB accreditation: December 2014

Date of first reaccreditation visit: 27 November 2017

Date of second reaccreditation visit: 23 February 2018

This accreditation is valid until June 2022

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

Description of the nursery:

The Caterpillar Montessori Nursery is located in the borough of Ealing in West London. It comprises two buildings behind a large church, situated adjacent to a park. Each of the buildings has a spacious hall which serves as the classroom, together with kitchen and toilet facilities. Each also has its own secure garden to which children have direct access. One building, called the New Hall, caters for the younger children aged 2 to 3 years, whereas the 3 to 5 year olds attend the Green Hall. The nursery has sole use of the buildings during its opening hours.

It is open five days a week during term-time, and also offers a holiday club for one week at Christmas and three weeks in the summer. The morning session runs from 08.00 to 12.30 each week day and the afternoon session is from 12.30 to 16.00 Monday to Thursday. Children staying for the afternoon session bring a packed lunch and attend a variety of clubs taught by specialist teachers. This accreditation report only covers the morning sessions, including the Breakfast Club that runs from 08.00 to 09.00. The majority of children arrive for 09.00.

The nursery has provision for 50 children, and currently has 37 on roll. On the day of the second reaccreditation visit there were 15 children attending the morning session. The setting provides for children with English as an additional language (EAL) and for those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).

The Caterpillar Montessori Nursery is privately owned and has been open since 1989. It is run by a full-time manager, with support from the owner who attends two to three days each week. The manager and five teaching staff work directly with the children. They attend a mixture of full and part-time hours. All the staff have relevant childcare qualifications; six, including the owner, hold Montessori International Diplomas, and all were present on the day of the second visit.

Summary

The Caterpillar Montessori Nursery provides a stimulating and nurturing environment where children are happy and learn through engaging with the variety of activities on offer. They thrive under the sensitive guidance of the staff team, and show respect and kindness to each other and to the adults. They develop independence and concentration as they choose their activities throughout the session, and are familiar with the routines and ground rules.

The well-qualified staff team works closely and effectively in each hall and across the setting, sharing information daily and more formally at weekly meetings. Parents speak very highly of the setting and the difference it has made to their children's learning and development.

In meeting recommendations made at the previous MEAB accreditation the team has continued to offer the children free-flow to the outside areas, and the well-planned and short circle times now take into account individual children's needs.

Following the first reaccreditation visit the setting has reviewed the learning provision to ensure that it meets the needs of each child. It has also reviewed its method of showing each child's progress within their Individual Learning Plan, which is now much clearer. Furthermore, the team has improved the topic-based planning so that this promotes more fully the Montessori continuous provision and work cycle. It has also begun recording peer observations and staff supervision meeting outcomes; these records have led to the development of an Action Plan for the setting and a training plan for staff. It is recommended that the peer observations record both the

observer's comments and those of the practitioner being observed. It is also recommended that training is sought in the use of positive language as part of the setting's focus on children's behaviour management. Both the manager and owner are committed to continuous improvement and to providing high quality Montessori practice for the benefit of the children.

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 embed the use of documented peer observations and include in these comments from the practitioner being observed; and
- consider undertaking staff training on positive language to further develop the team's skills in behaviour management.

Philosophy:

The Caterpillar Montessori Nursery's aims and ethos are clearly stated in the Prospectus, Parent Handbook and online. Its commitment to the Montessori approach is evident in its caring environment where each child is nurtured according to their interests and needs. The children have time to self-select their activities from the start of their session, and the adults skillfully support them with presentations when appropriate.

The younger children enjoy an environment especially prepared for them. They develop the ability to choose and return their work, ably modelled by the adults, and demonstrate high levels of wellbeing and involvement. Similarly, the older children show confidence as they engage in self-initiated activities, working alongside or with their peers.

Staff members reflect regularly on their practice (during staff meetings for example), and they role-model the behavioural expectations and ground rules for the children. This leads to a calm environment where the children feel safe and valued, and are free to explore and learn at their own pace. In order to develop further behaviour management strategies, it is recommended that staff attend training on positive language so as to be more consistent as a team.

Learning and Development:

The Caterpillar Montessori Nursery provides a broad range of learning experiences in both the halls and outside. The New Hall is made up of two large areas that the children freely move between, one of which is set up with the youngest children's needs clearly in mind. It offers them plenty of space for sand play and for small world play (for example with a garage and train track); it has a spacious book corner with comfortable

cushions, and a home- and role-play area. It also has accessible shelving with Montessori activities for everyday living aimed to develop children's fine motor skills and concentration, and others to introduce them to sorting and grading. Children evidently initiate their own learning and, during the second reaccreditation visit, live chicks were a strong focus for their observation and discussion, together with related life-cycle activities. These younger children are introduced to skills for their independent learning through, for example, being shown how to carry a tray to a table and how to complete a cycle of activity by returning resources to their place once finished with.

The other area in the New Hall has a greater range of activities on shelves, organised by Montessori curriculum areas, and tables for art and play dough. The nature table with broad beans germinating in a jar was a special point of interest during the second visit, and children were encouraged to match pictures to the stages of growth. In the Green Hall children also have a good balance of child-initiated and adult-led activities; for example, a guided craft activity that involved gluing feathers onto a picture of a chick was popular, while other children worked alone or in pairs. Adults support the children's learning well and provide enriching language in context to enhance the children's thinking and understanding. All the children enjoy a work cycle of at least 2¾ hours, during which they have opportunities to go outside. During the second visit, which was a very cold day, most of the older children chose to join in playing 'What's the time, Mr. Wolf?' in their garden, while others played in the sand pit. In both gardens opportunities for socialising and developing vocabulary were apparent and extended by the adults.

In both halls there is a short circle time towards the end of the session, which children choose to attend or not. These include age-related activities, such as blowing bubbles and finding objects in a bag for the 2 year olds, and following visual instructions while playing instruments for the older children. Makaton signing is used to support children's communication during these groups; this is especially beneficial for those with additional needs. A short music session is offered on Wednesday mornings, which all the children are encouraged to attend. The children across the setting also have the opportunity to come together sometimes for outdoor play and in the afternoons.

The termly topic plans are broken down into weekly projects, to include areas of current interest such as festivals and seasons. These group activities are planned with reference to the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) areas of learning and development, with links to the Montessori curriculum. Following the recommendation from the first visit, this planning is now drawn up to focus on topic-based activities that are adapted according to the children's interests, and it now blends well with the Montessori continuous provision and work cycle. Thoughtfully made additional materials available during the second visit reflected the planned theme and included model chickens to count and match to numerals, as well as a practical activity of grinding up eggshells with a pestle and mortar.

Each child has a Learning Journal containing the planning drawn up for them and evidence of their progress, including observations, photographs and an EYFS progress checklist. This planning and recording is done mainly by the child's key person, although all staff members also work with and observe each other's children. An Individual Learning Plan for the child is prepared near the start of each term and an evaluation of

progress with these targets is made by the key person and the child's parents towards the end of the term. Targets that have been met are now dated, so as to be able to demonstrate clearly ongoing progress. The remaining targets feed into the next steps in learning, together with any new plans. For children with SEND or EAL, links are made with outside professionals and individual plans are drawn up together with the child's family. The activities on offer provide very suitable and varied learning experiences for all the children attending the nursery.

Prepared Environment: resources and materials

The environment at The Caterpillar Montessori Nursery is very favourably prepared for the children. The New Hall has activities suited to the younger children including early Montessori curriculum materials. The resources are plentiful for the number of children attending, and ready for use. The staff team has carefully reviewed the activities on offer for this age group following the first reaccreditation visit, and has provided additional suitable materials, such as models of the ladybird life-cycle to match to pictures as well as objects for I-spy to develop vocabulary and phonic awareness. During the second visit a child was engaged in an activity matching models of landmarks to photographs and was able to convey their preferences.

The Green Hall has a greater range of Montessori materials from each curriculum area to meet the needs of these older children. During the first visit there were examples of children extending their knowledge of word-building, counting with one to one correspondence using model mini-beasts on the nature table, and role-playing in the home corner. In both halls there is ample floor space for movement and to work on mats, and the tables are arranged to promote choice for children as to where they work and with whom, with flexible seating arrangements.

The outside environment is prepared with a variety of activities that extend and supplement the indoor provision. There are opportunities for counting, mark-making, water, sand, and sensory play, a mud kitchen, and raised beds for planting and harvesting. There is also the space for more physical play such as balancing, and for role-play and painting. The nursery also makes good use of the adjacent spacious park for walks and to access the enclosed play area, where the children can use equipment such as a slide and swings.

In both halls there are comfortable book corners where children can rest and look at books during the session. Bed mats are available for those who need to sleep.

The team uses staff meetings as an opportunity to discuss the learning provision together, and each hall's team also considers carefully their children's developmental needs and interests.

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

Independence is fostered extremely well throughout the session, from when the children arrive and take off their coats and bags, until they get ready to go home. The morning work cycle is very well managed and engenders children's independence and a calm atmosphere. Children can choose their activities on arrival. Some decide to work alongside their peers, while others choose to work by themselves. This freedom of choice demonstrates the adults' respect for each child's inner drive and natural rhythm. During the session children continue to self-select their activities, and even the youngest engage spontaneously in their work and return materials to the shelves before embarking on another activity. The children can usually decide when to go outside, as free-flow is encouraged throughout the session. On the day of the second reaccreditation visit children from both halls accessed their outdoor spaces when they wished. In both halls their independence is supported and encouraged in putting on boots and coats.

Children are also encouraged to be independent in their self-care, with adults supporting this and demonstrating processes such as hand-washing to the 2 year olds. Snack is laid out and is available for when children choose to take it. Their decision-making is respected as they find their name card and place it into a box to self-register for snack. They take their cup, plate and fruit, which they peel at the table, and pour their own drink.

Parents speak very positively of how they are encouraged during meetings with the key person to foster their child's independence at home, and suggestions for this are also written on the back of their child's Individual Learning Plan.

Montessori Practice: links with parents, including reports and records

Links with parents are excellent, with information exchanged between the nursery and home via the large notice boards and termly and weekly newsletters. Parents comment very favourably on the information they receive about their child, whether daily at pick-up from the key person, or through reports and the termly parent evenings. They also greatly value the opportunity to enter the classrooms on Fridays towards the end of the session, both to talk with the key person and to see their child working with materials and showing them some favourite activities.

When a child starts at The Caterpillar Montessori Nursery the parents complete a Pre-Entry form, which helps them communicate their child's needs and interests to staff. The mandatory two year old progress check is completed very thoroughly by the key person in conjunction with the parents within the first half term of a 2 year old starting at the setting. End of year reports are prepared by the key person, summarising the child's progress in all curriculum areas. When children move on to school transition reports are written and shared with parents.

Parents speak very highly of their child's experience at the nursery. During the first

reaccreditation visit one commented on how stimulating it is for her child and on the child's rate of progress. Another reported to be very happy with the nursery, as here her child learns through play.

Staff: qualifications, deployment, and performance management

The owner is a very experienced Montessori practitioner who is passionate about providing high quality learning experiences for the children and continuing professional development for staff. The manager, who is relatively new in post, is also experienced, with a Foundation Degree in Early Years. She plans to study the Integrating Montessori Practice course so as to be fully conversant with the ethos of the nursery. Of the other five teachers, all hold the Montessori International Diploma, and one has Early Years Teacher Status.

The staff team works very collaboratively in the children's best interests. Three adults are based in each hall and are key teachers to the children who attend there. The manager works full-time with the children and is also the SENCo. She has effective support from the owner who is on site regularly. The very good relationships between the team members are demonstrated by their respectful, kind behaviour towards each other, which also provides excellent role-modelling for the children.

The setting's policies and procedures are complete and up to date, and daily checks are carried out. All staff members receive a thorough induction including being given a detailed staff handbook, and have current job descriptions and annual appraisals. The weekly minuted staff meetings ensure that information is shared effectively. Following the first reaccreditation visit written peer observations have taken place; it is recommended that comments from the practitioner being observed are also documented in these, so as to further encourage reflective practice. Supervision meetings have also begun to take place and information from these, from observations, and from staff members' appraisals is being fed into a staff training plan. The manager is encouraging reflective practice across the team and identified areas and staff's suggestions for improvement are being used to form an ongoing Action Plan.

This well-qualified team is guided by the enthusiasm of the owner and manager. Together they successfully guide all staff members to provide a nurturing, stimulating environment in which the children can develop and thrive.

Name of Assessor: Mary Lazo

Date report submitted: First visit – 29 November 2017

Second visit – 26 February 2018