

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.

Little Sponges Montessori

38a Hyde Vale, Greenwich, London SE10 8QH

Date of previous MEAB accreditation: June 2014

Date of first reaccreditation visit: 12 May 2017

Date of second reaccreditation visit: 9 October 2017

This accreditation is valid until December 2021

This accreditation report relates to the provision for children aged 2 to 4 years old.

Description of the nursery:

Little Sponges Montessori is situated in a detached house in a residential area of Greenwich. The nursery occupies the entire premises. On the ground floor there is a large open-plan room that serves as the main classroom. It includes a space for coats and bags. This room leads in to a conservatory, which has access to a raised and partly covered, decked outdoor classroom. Beyond the decking is an enclosed garden which has a small brick building (containing a role-play den and separate storage room) and a small grassed area. There is a kitchen to one side of the main classroom and a hallway with a parent noticeboard. On the first floor there is a staff/parent meeting room, an office and a sensory room for the children. The nursery operates two sessions daily, Monday to Friday during term time; morning sessions run from 09.30 to 12.00 and afternoon sessions are from 12.30 to 15.00, with a lunch period in between. Children

attend for a variety of sessions.

There are 36 children enrolled. Of these, 25 are under 3 years of age. The number of children attending on the day of the second reaccreditation visit was 14 in the morning and 11 in the afternoon, of whom four came in just for the afternoon. Those staying for both sessions bring packed lunches. Provision is made for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities, and for those with English as an additional language; staff members seek training and support from the local authority and work collaboratively with these children's families. Little Sponges Montessori opened in 2007 as registered home-based care and re-registered as a nursery group in September 2010. There are four members of teaching staff, including the owner/head and a deputy, all are Montessori qualified and three work full-time.

Summary

The team at Little Sponges Montessori is committed to delivering care and education to the children in line with Montessori practices and the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). To ensure that this commitment is met the owner and her team review their provision on a regular basis, embrace continuing professional development and work in close partnership with parents and other agencies. Parents' views are sought and acted upon when planning children's learning. These excellent practices benefit the children and their families. Parents praise the nursery for its dedication to the wellbeing of their child and for the close links forged with them. They feel listened to and therefore confident to be partners in their child's education. The children display high levels of self-esteem and independence. They are confident to talk to the adults, to seek their support when needed and to engage visitors in their play and conversation. They relish the opportunity they have to learn spontaneously both in and outdoors.

Children make good progress in their learning and development due to the careful planning and assessment carried out by staff for each child. This clearly links the Montessori curriculum and the EYFS, it draws on the close partnership with parents and other agencies, and takes the children's interests into consideration.

Leadership and management are effective as the head regularly consults with her team members and takes their views on every aspect of practice into consideration. They feel valued and therefore make very positive contributions to the day-to-day running of this setting.

The two recommendations made during the previous MEAB accreditation have been met. One of the recommendations made during the first reaccreditation visit, to consider giving the children china crockery to use at snack and lunch, has been fully met. The team has also given due consideration to the second recommendation by moving some of the indoor resources into store areas and reducing the number of toys available outdoors at any one time. The outdoor toys are offered to the children in rotation, thus providing them with greater opportunity to fully explore that which is on offer. Some of the Montessori learning materials indoors have also been stored until the children are

ready for them. However, there is still a large quantity of learning resources available to the children at any one time here. It is therefore recommended that the setting reflects further on this aspect of provision. It is also recommended that the strategies which are in place to ensure that the staff team's presentations of materials to children remain uninterrupted are maintained at all times, so that the child and adult can concentrate fully during this interaction.

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:

- give further consideration to the recommendation made during the first reaccreditation visit to reduce the quantity of learning resources offered at any one time; and
- make sure that the strategies which exist to ensure that presentations are not interrupted are maintained, so that the adult and child can remain focused.

Philosophy:

Montessori practices and philosophy underpin the services provided by this setting to the children and their families. The adults are experienced in delivering this method of education. This is evident throughout the daily routine. Their very good understanding of the philosophy and Montessori curriculum enables them to plan effectively for each individual child, to trust them to access learning spontaneously both in and outdoors and to help the children make the most of the vertical age-grouping. The children work and play in harmony. Their independent learning is facilitated during the work cycles offered both in the morning and afternoon. To further enhance the excellent aspects of the provision already in place the staff team should consider implementing the recommendations made during the second reaccreditation visit.

The nursery's Montessori ethos is defined clearly in writing and is made available to the parents on the website. The quality of its services which include Montessori practices is regularly evaluated by the whole team.

Learning and Development:

Children's learning and development is very well supported at Little Sponges Montessori. Their progress with the learning and development outcomes of the EYFS is fully provided for through their use of Montessori materials and a wide range of other resources. A web-based software programme is used to record and assess each child's learning and development. The key persons refer to the charts compiled on the system, their recorded observations and evaluations, along with the outcomes of discussions during staff meetings and information from parents, to plan the child's next steps of learning and to draw up summative assessments. The staff team has a good overview of

children's progress in both the Montessori curriculum and the EYFS's areas of learning and development, as the digital system links these clearly. The parents report favourably on staff's use of the web-based system as this gives them up to date information on their child's progress as well a very useful means of communication with their child's key person. The system is password protected.

Informative long- and medium-term plans are drawn up together by the team. The topics covered are chosen by the staff having followed the children's wide interests, and they are modified as needed. For instance, the preparation of bird food was added to the spring topic in evidence at the first reaccreditation visit, this accommodated some children's interest and they showed delight in the activity, enthusiastically talking about it with their peers and adults.

The quality of the interaction between the children and the adults is generally very high. Staff members actively participate in children's play, moving each child's learning forward by, for example, asking a variety of open-ended questions and by showing a genuine interest in their activities. Spontaneous opportunities are used to promote good behaviour, celebrate successes, and to introduce new vocabulary and ideas. During the second visit some presentations of Montessori materials were of a high standard, while others did not fully achieve their aims. It is therefore recommended that the strategies which are in place to ensure that presentations are not interrupted are maintained, so that both the adult and child can focus clearly on the activity and one to one interaction. During the work cycle, which runs continuously throughout each session, the children have the opportunity to participate in a range of adult-led group activities such as art, singing, dancing and sessions in the first floor's sensory room. The children are free to choose to join these groups or to continue with their chosen task. The free-flow between the indoor and outdoor provision further promotes children's independence and offers them plentiful opportunities for the refinement of gross motor and other skills.

Prepared Environment: resources and materials

The learning environment, in and outdoors, is conscientiously maintained by the team. At the end of each day the resources are checked to ensure that they are complete, clean and appealing. The children respond well to what has been created for them and they take pride in being partners in the environment's upkeep. They clean up their spills, sweep the floor, help set up for lunch and prepare flowers for the tables. During the second reaccreditation visit a child was observed sweeping the floor with great purpose and displayed high levels of engagement with this chosen task. Children's preferences to work on mats, on the floor, at tables or in small groups are respected. A large sofa, which is enjoyed by the children, provides a cosy and comfortable area should they need to have a rest or sleep.

The main classroom is organised in accordance with the Montessori curriculum. Each area contains a wide range of Montessori and other learning materials which are displayed on low shelves and are accessible to children at all times. However, due to the large number of resources available all the time the shelves appear cluttered. To further enhance the high-quality provision of this setting it is recommended that more

consideration be given to the removal of some of the resources, to store them until they are required.

The beautifully prepared sensory room contains a range of excellent quality resources which help refine the children's senses. Small groups of children are invited, on a regular basis, to visit this room. The outdoor environment has a digging area, a mud kitchen, a sand and water tray, painting easel, a slide, as well as other learning resources. Following a recommendation made during the first visit the toys are offered in rotation, this provides the children with more space in which to move around and with the opportunity to fully explore what is on offer.

Mealtimes are sociable occasions. Snack is available in the main room throughout the sessions and the children self-register for this when they want to take it, then help themselves. This allows for the work cycle to be continuous, both in the morning and afternoon. Those who stay for lunch eat together with a member of staff in the main room. Conversations about healthy eating fully engage the children. This good practice benefits the children as they are beginning to build an understanding of how a nourishing diet contributes to their well-being. The recommendation made at the first visit, to provide the children with china crockery, has been met. Overall, this is a well-prepared Montessori environment.

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

Support for children's developing independence is excellent. The extended daily work cycles, free-flow between indoors and out, the accessibility of resources on low shelves, and the trust the adults place in the children to learn spontaneously all fully facilitate the children's quest for independence. The children take full advantage of this freedom. They select what to play with both indoors and out and with whom to share their activities. They treat the learning materials and each other with respect. For those who are not yet fully aware of the ground rules in place, gentle reminders are given by the staff and sometimes by other children. On the day of the first reaccreditation visit an older child reminded a younger one to walk in the classroom and to return a completed activity to the shelf. The adults role-model good behaviour during play and emphasise the need for the children to use kind words and gestures towards each other. Consistency of approach amongst the team ensures that every child feels secure and is helped to develop self-esteem. Respect for other cultures is fostered through festival celebrations and the use of books and artefacts.

Independence at home is promoted through informal daily conversations, through the web-based system and during scheduled meetings. The parents value this close partnership and the suggestions given on how to follow the Montessori principles at home.

Montessori Practice: links with parents, including reports and records

Partnership with parents is exemplary. Those interviewed during both reaccreditation visits praised the setting highly for this aspect of its practice. The open-door policy, which is fully operational, facilitates regular contact with the head and each child's key person. There are plenty of opportunities for daily informal discussions during drop-off and pick-up times, annual opportunities to meet more formally, as well as further meetings as and when required. The web-based system, which is regularly updated, gives parents an insight into their child's learning and development as well as suggestions for continuity of learning at home. The photographs and observations posted on the system are used to engage the whole family in conversations and to encourage their support with specific activities when the child needs this. The website is informative, as are the newsletters. Parents are invited to participate in the life of the setting. They share their expertise or interests with the staff and children, join in outings and support the team in the celebration of cultural festivals.

The key person duties, which are defined in writing, are understood and followed by all. However, all adults contribute to the child's records. At this small setting, every member of the team knows each child and their family well. The mandatory two year old progress check is carried out with the parents. It celebrates the child's successes and identifies areas for development. A yearly report is given to the parents at the end of the summer term. It is comprehensive and, according to the parents interviewed, it depicts their child's development accurately. A full final report, which covers all areas of learning in accordance with the EYFS, is given to the child's next school. Questionnaires are given out to both parents and children to help staff assess and improve the quality of the service provided.

Staff: qualifications, deployment, and performance management

The four members of staff all work directly with the children and all hold a Level 4 Montessori qualification. They are experienced and skilled in delivering care and education in line with Montessori principles and the EYFS. Their skills in making presentations of Montessori materials to the child would be further enhanced by consistently applying the strategies which help ensure that these are not interrupted.

The owner/head is fully involved in the daily life of the establishment. She is committed to maintaining the high-quality provision for which this setting has become known in the community. Leadership is strong as the head takes the views of the staff, children and parents on board, thus creating a style of management that is inclusive. Her team and the parents feel valued and listened to. The well-defined organisational structure is displayed on the parents and staff notice boards. There is an induction process and the job descriptions are differentiated for staff members' roles, distinctly setting out the expectations for each member of the team. The clear policies and procedures are shared with parents via the website. These policies and procedures effectively underpin the daily practices of the setting, and the whole team contributes to their revision. This high level of involvement enables all to have a thorough understanding of their duties and responsibilities.

Staff appraisals are carried out termly and performance in all aspects of staff members' practice is evaluated. Continuing professional development needs are identified during this process and through informal discussions with the head. Staff members attend Montessori conferences and local authority training. A development plan is in place, and it is effective as it celebrates the setting's successes and puts forward areas for further improvement. The plan is evaluated yearly with the team to ascertain if the goals set were met and to formulate a new one for the following academic year.

Staff meetings are held informally daily and formally fortnightly. Fortnightly meetings are minuted, individual children's progress and needs are discussed at these meetings, as well as any other business that requires attention. The team is fully committed to delivering very high quality care and education in this excellent Montessori setting.

Name of Assessor: Rosie Roberts

Date report submitted: 14th October 2017