

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". The second visit sought to assess the progress made following recommendations set out in the report from the first 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 first accreditation visit: 5 April 2011

Date of second accreditation visit: 24 May 2011

This accreditation report relates to the provision for children aged two to four years.

Description of the school:

Little Sponges Montessori opened in 2007 as home-based care and moved to non-domestic premises in September 2010. The nursery is located in a residential street on the Greenwich/Blackheath borders in the London borough of Greenwich. The whole of the property is used for nursery purposes.

There are currently 58 children on roll aged between 2 and 4 years. Each session is attended by a total of twelve children, which is the number that the nursery is registered for. Children attend from the local and surrounding areas for a variety of sessions. 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. The nursery currently supports a number of children who speak English as an additional language, as well as caring for children with special dietary needs. The ground floor is open-plan and comprises a large room leading onto a conservatory with access to a raised and partly covered, decked outdoor play area. Beyond the decking is an enclosed garden, with a small brick building which serves as a role play area and provides a separate storage space. 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 are bathroom facilities for staff, an office and a further play room for the children.

There are five members of staff in total, including the owner/manager and the administrator, of whom three are Montessori qualified and one is working towards completing her Montessori

training.

There are always three members of the team working with the children each session, one member of staff works part-time.

Summary and conclusion.

Little Sponges Montessori offers a caring home from home environment to children and their families. The proprietor and members of staff respect the 'unique child' and they stress the importance of the individual child settling into the nurturing and loving environment of the nursery. The aim at Little Sponges Montessori is to offer each child the highest quality care and education in a carefully prepared and stimulating environment where the adults guide each child in developing confidence and independence. This is perceived to be the foundation of building trusting relationships with children and their families. Children are exposed to a wide range of resources to promote a deeper understanding of diversity. Different cultures, customs and festivals are celebrated at Little Sponges enabling the children to gain respect for each other. The proprietor and her staff are enthusiastic, passionate and committed to providing a high quality, homely, warm and loving educational provision for the children and their families. This is reflected in the wide-ranging and ambitious development plan, to which all staff and parents are able to contribute. Qualified Montessorians and a commitment to on-going staff development ensure that children's learning is well supported.

The school provides an education which follows the principles of the Montessori approach and environment. This merits accreditation by the Montessori Evaluation and Accreditation Board . The school has successfully achieved the points for action recommended on the first visit, which are documented within this report. Points for ongoing development:

- Continue to facilitate the full work-cycle, both indoors and outdoors.
- Ensure that the newly introduced peer on peer observation system is used consistently by staff to support staff appraisal procedure and continuous professional development.

Philosophy:

The aim at Little Sponges Montessori is to offer each child the highest quality care and education in a carefully prepared and stimulating environment where the adults guide the individual child towards confidence and independence. Little Sponges Montessori offers a caring home from home environment for children and their families. Their ethos and principles are defined in writing in their 'Mission Statement' and on their website.

Close collaboration between adults, within the classroom and through regular staff meetings, ensures children receive appropriate support whilst promoting an ethos of following the child.

Following the first accreditation visit all members of staff reviewed and evaluated the daily routine and implemented the full work cycle by giving opportunities to children to choose activities freely, as well as free-flow access both indoors and outdoors. Children have also been

introduced to the preparation of snack, and the choice of individual or group snack, according to the children's ages and stages of development. During the second visit the children had opportunities to explore the activities spontaneously both indoors and outdoors, which has been helping children to develop their confidence and independence within the favourable environment. Partnership with parents is very good, and staff work hard to communicate and collaborate with them, for the benefit of all the children. Children's needs and welfare are paramount, with independence, responsibility and respect being promoted throughout the setting.

Learning and Development:

Learning is organised within the areas of the Montessori curriculum with weekly and monthly projects planned around the EYFS areas of learning and development. This process is overseen by the whole team. During the second accreditation visit the children were introduced to a theme of farm animals and two local mounted police officers visited the setting. The children were encouraged to have discussions and ask questions about horses and their needs, their names, and how they help the police force.

The children's individual needs and interests are closely observed and recorded by the key person, although due to the small group of children the key person system is flexible depending on which teacher the child wants to engage with during the session. The indoor and outdoor activities are planned and evaluated daily. Following the first accreditation visit consideration has been given by all members of staff on how to offer spontaneous free-flow between the indoor and outdoor environments, which is now reflected in their short, medium and long- term planning. Knowledge of individual children is used to make some adaptations to planning on a day to day basis. Due to the small number of children the proprietor and her staff plan together.

Staff carry out brief daily narrative and photo observations. Subsequent to the recommendations made on the first visit a more detailed narrative observation system has been developed through the 'Observation forms', 'Key worker planning sheet' and 'Learning stories' documents, that enable staff to assess their observations and to plan the child's next steps. Since the first accreditation visit all members of staff implemented video observations by using a hands-free camera, which they have found to be useful for observing the individual child's interests and needs during activities, as well as staff's interaction with the child.

The proprietor and her staff follow the individual child's progress through a well developed and detailed 'Learning Journey' portfolio, which is structured on the six areas of learning within the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). This portfolio includes the child's record form and a settling-in questionnaire which is given to parents to encourage them to follow the child's interests at home. The Montessori and the EYFS areas of learning are integrated in this portfolio by using a 'progress sheet' for EYFS/Montessori areas of learning, as well as the assessed observations and planning sheet for the child's next steps.

Little Sponges Montessori puts strong emphasis on celebrating each child's cultural background and achievement and offers multicultural activities such as inviting parents or artists from different cultures (for example, inviting in an Irish band), as well as promoting discussions

about celebrating our differences through art, music and food.

They also encourage communication and literacy skills through songs, nursery rhymes, stories, as well as discussions about feelings and experiences at home with family. Little Sponges Montessori offers a range of resources and books to help children with additional needs/difficulties and staff attend training. They also cater for children's individual dietary needs, as well as children with severe allergies.

One member of staff is a designated SENCO who receives support from the local authority. The SENCO keeps a supplementary detailed portfolio, with activity record form and Individual Education Plan.

Prepared Environment: resources and materials

Little Sponges Montessori offers a carefully planned and homely environment for the children. They have access to the downstairs area, which consists of a bathroom, kitchen, a light spacious room and conservatory.

The entrance hall is used on arrival and departure of the children; however children leave their coats and shoes in the far end of the conservatory to facilitate easy access to the outdoor space.

The large room is divided into the Montessori areas of learning (sensorial, language, mathematics, practical life, creative and cultural) and includes a book and music corner, built-in marine fish tank, art and craft area, as well as access to outdoors. The outdoor space leads from the conservatory to a large decked area with sand and water play, art and sensory activities. Beyond the decking is an enclosed garden area for planting and climbing activities. A small brick building at the end of the garden provides a role play area and separate storage space.

A wide range of high quality Montessori and additional resources are available both indoors and outdoors, subsequent to the recommendations made on the first visit the materials have been rearranged in a systematic order to enable children's easy access to activities. During the second visit the children had free-flow access indoors and outdoors. Resources are used to their full potential and offered with children's individual needs in mind, which encourages spontaneous free flow and consistent support for cycles of activity and implementation of a full work cycle.

Montessori practice: *independence, independence at home, freedom, respect.*

Little Sponges Montessori has recently moved premises and staff have demonstrated the importance of listening to the child's voice during this period of transition by creating a 'Children's Views' portfolio.

The children are encouraged to share and take turns, with many activities promoting this. All

members of staff ensure that they provide the best role model to the children by treating them with respect, listening to them, talking in a calm voice and using positive language at all times. Children are treated and valued as unique individuals, they are encouraged to interact with one another positively by participating in group activities during which they discuss how to respect each other and each other's feelings. Children are encouraged to resolve difficulties between themselves by staff explaining why certain behaviour is not acceptable. The 'house rules' are consistently reinforced and the children understand what is expected of them.

Children are exposed to a wide range of resources to promote a broad understanding of diversity. By providing an inclusive environment, all children and staff are encouraged to treat everyone with respect.

Following the first accreditation visit the full work cycle and spontaneous use of the materials have been implemented into the daily routine. Staff have a strong commitment to the principle of respecting and following the 'unique child' and this is combined with very good role modelling from adults. Following the first accreditation visit video observations have been introduced to enable staff to evaluate their approach of when and how to interact with the child, and to be able to maximize children's independence within the favourable environment.

Communication with parents is very good. Regular updates, both general and individual, with opportunities for parents to access and contribute to learning portfolios, encourages parents to follow up with projects and with the Montessori ethos at home. Little Sponges Montessori also has an open-door policy and parents are able to access their child's 'Learning Journey' portfolio on a daily basis.

The proprietor and her staff are in the process of introducing individual parents meetings in summer-term 2011, which will be followed by a parent meeting report.

Montessori practice: classroom management

Classroom management is defined in writing in the 'Routine of the Day' and 'Classroom management' documents, which includes staff duties, the role of the directress, settling-in policy and key person approach. All members of staff show strong teamwork, respect and care towards the children and each other, as well as creating a homely and relaxed environment. All members of staff oversee the preparation and maintenance of the indoor and outdoor environments. Regular observations by the team and key person monitor the learning environments to ensure that they continue to meet the needs of the children and reflect the curriculum. Subsequent to the recommendations made on the first visit a full work cycle has been implemented to facilitate children's spontaneous choice of activities without adult interruptions. All staff value and respect the child's independent choice, guiding them as needed to activities appropriate for their development.

The children's individual needs and interests are closely observed and recorded by the key person.

Good teamwork, regular staff meetings and access to training opportunities through the local authority all contribute to the shared understanding of the EYFS and Montessori principles.

There is a strong commitment to implement these fully into the nursery practice.

Montessori Practice: links with parents, including reports and records

The key person system gives children a sense of security; parents comment on the fact that children know who to go to if feeling upset or concerned. Staff have a very good understanding of health and safety. There are detailed policies, regular risk assessments (including daily checks) and all staff members' health and safety awareness is carefully monitored by the proprietor through the 'Safeguarding Action Plan for Staff' document. Staff are aware of potential hazards and take appropriate steps to minimize them.

Following the first accreditation visit staff have implemented video and detailed narrative observations that are assessed on a weekly basis. The introduction of regular planned observations of free play greatly enhances the quality of information available for both formative and summative assessment.

All staff contribute to record keeping, with key people responsible for maintaining learning portfolios for their 'family' of children. They provide a useful record of each child's learning and development, which celebrates the individual child's achievement. Communication with parents is very good. Parents are encouraged to look at their child's learning journeys. All members of staff are happy to speak to parents. Parents comment on the openness of staff and the ease with which they can discuss issues with them, as well as being well informed about the on-going development of the setting. There are many opportunities for parents to engage with staff in both formal and informal ways; there are monthly newsletters that keep parents very well informed about events in the nursery, current themes and ways to support children's learning at home. A recent survey of parents showed that they are very pleased with the level of information they receive, the quality of the provision and the rate of progress achieved by the children. The small number of children attending and the mixed age group is also appreciated by the parents, as is the monitoring of progress and the promotion of confidence.

A document entitled 'Sharing Curriculum Information between Providers' is also available to parents if their child attends other childcare provisions. The document enables members of staff at Little Sponges to work in partnership and exchange information about the child's learning and progress with other settings. The 'Early Learning Foundation Stage Transfer Record' form is sent with the child's 'Learning Journey' portfolio when the child leaves for another school. This provides parents with a written summary of their child's progress when they leave.

Staffing:

The setting has a clearly defined management structure with detailed job descriptions and support for new staff members, with a three-month probation period, an induction day and a welcome pack. As a result, members of staff are clear about their roles and responsibilities and feel well supported by the whole team. Team work is excellent with all staff being aware of the need to support each other and to ensure that ratios and supervision are always appropriate.

Because the proprietor works closely with staff, it enables her to monitor and develop provision to the benefit of all. She makes sure that trained staff and trainees have shared understanding and commitment to the Montessori approach. She carries out appraisals with new staff after the three month probationary period, as well as annual appraisals. The staff appraisal document clearly highlights the purpose of appraisal, with a performance and self-assessment sheet. After staff appraisal meetings a meeting record form and a personal review and development scheme form are completed by the proprietor with each staff member.

Following the first assessment visit, video observations have been introduced to support peer observations. The proprietor has also developed an evaluation form to support staff appraisal and continuous professional development based on these observations; all staff contribute to this process. Procedures are in place for the induction of new staff, students and volunteers, including a detailed checklist of documentation, observations and meetings with staff, as well as guidance regarding the link between the EYFS and Every Child Matters Framework.

At present there are three members of staff who hold Montessori qualifications and one staff member is working towards Montessori qualification.

Staff have undertaken a wide range of training provided by the local authority, covering special needs, child protection, first aid and the EYFS. One member of staff is also SENCO trained and is considering further training. Commitment to continuous professional development has a very positive impact on both the quality of the provision and the confidence of staff.

Detailed records are kept of staff meetings showing what has been discussed and some indication of the outcome of those discussions. Opportunities for all staff to contribute to the whole nursery development plan are excellent.

There is good capacity for development in the setting. The proprietor and her staff are enthusiastic, capable and committed to providing a high quality, homely, warm and loving Montessori provision for children and their families, which is reflected in the wide-ranging and ambitious development of the setting's documentation, to which all staff, and parents, are able to contribute.

All members of staff show a positive attitude towards their continued professional development, which helps enhance the quality of the provision.

Andrea Dalling

Name of Assessor

27/05/2011

Date of report