



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” (2008) and subsequent 2012 revisions. 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 Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) which reports separately. Also the report does not provide any assessment of financial aspects of the school.

New Park Nursery and Montessori School

67 Highbury New Park, Highbury, London N5 2EU

Date of the first re-accreditation visit: 11 March 2014
Date of the second re-accreditation visit: 10 June 2014

Date of previous MEAB accreditation: June 2011

This accreditation report relates to the provision for children aged 4 months to 5 years old.

Description of the school

New Park Nursery and Montessori School is a privately owned setting located in the London Borough of Islington. It opened in 1994 and is one of a group of five nurseries under the same ownership.

The setting operates from the lower ground floor of a private residence; the upper floors cannot be accessed from the setting. The indoor facilities include a reception/cloakroom, five play rooms including one specifically for babies and toddlers, as well as children’s toilets and nappy changing area, kitchen, laundry room, office and adult toilets. Outside, there is large front garden and an enclosed courtyard garden at the back.

The setting is open for 50 weeks a year, from 07.30 to 18.30, Monday to Friday. When children first join New Park their parents choose whether their child will attend two, three, four or five days per week and, once chosen, their child attends on these same days each week. The provision caters for a maximum of 36 children a day. On the occasion of the second re-accreditation visit there were 14 children in the Infant Community (for children up to 2½ years of age) with four staff and additional part-time help, and 20 children in the School rooms with four staff. The total number enrolled is 48. The setting provides breakfast, a hot lunch and afternoon tea, and healthy snacks are also offered during the day.



The provision supports children with special education needs and disabilities (SEND) and English as an additional language (EAL).

The owner, the head of the School rooms, and the manager, all have a level 4 Montessori qualification and the eight other members of staff all hold either Montessori or appropriate child care qualifications. The setting also employs a full time chef.

Summary

The strengths of New Park Montessori are its detailed planning, recording and assessment procedures along with its close relationship with the children's families.

The highly qualified staff use their knowledge of Montessori philosophy to offer the children a carefully prepared environment that encourages exploration and eagerness to learn. Children move confidently both inside and outdoors, respecting the environment they work in.

Observation is the key to the detailed planning documents produced by the setting and to the daily evaluation and reflection of activities, which have been implemented following a recommendation made during the previous MEAB accreditation.

The Infant Community offers even the youngest children a rich sensory environment and supports their growing independence, while the School rooms build on the children's experiences, offering a range of resources that promote learning. The indoor environments in both the Infant and School rooms are extremely well resourced with plenty of activities to engage the children's interests, and they are appropriate for each age and stage of development. Following a previous recommendation, the layout of the Infant Community has been changed to enable children to access all areas of learning.

Staff plan activities for the front garden and, following a recommendation from the first re-accreditation visit, they have added extra resources that encourage children to use the courtyard space at the rear of the premises as an extension to their indoor classrooms.

Children work spontaneously during the course of the 2½ to 2¾ hour work cycle in the morning, both indoors and outside, while the afternoon offers the flexibility of children participating in creative activities such as cookery, drama, music and movement or yoga, or continuing to work with the Montessori resources.

Parents have high regard for the care and education their children receive and are made to feel an important part of the setting. They receive daily feedback along with written communication at the end of each week via the 'Complete Guides'.

Staff training is given high priority and, following a recommendation made during the last MEAB accreditation, there are regular supervision meetings to help develop staff practice further. This is in addition to annual appraisals and the comprehensive induction procedure.

This is a team of highly knowledgeable and committed Montessorians who recognize the uniqueness of the child, the importance of observation in their planning and the benefits of a strong partnership with parents.



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 develop the courtyard garden as an extension to the classrooms, adding resources and activities that challenge and engage the children.

Philosophy:

The Montessori provision is of a very high standard, and careful thought is given to the setting's set up and maintenance. The highly qualified staff acknowledge the uniqueness of the child by allowing the opportunity and time for each child to explore this supportive environment. This was evident from the variety of activities the children accessed during the course of the day in both the Infant Community and School rooms during the re-accreditation visits.

Parents are well informed about the Montessori philosophy and have the opportunity at parents evenings to be introduced to specific aspects of Montessori education. There is a very informative website with details of the daily routine (which is particularly relevant for parents of the babies and toddlers), as well as a parents noticeboard that displays information regarding future events at the setting.

The setting has recently updated its self-evaluation document and policies and procedures are regularly reviewed at staff meetings. Its goals and principles can be found on the website and in the setting's prospectus; these reflect the importance of supporting the children to achieve their full potential.

Overall, the setting offers excellent Montessori care and education, helping the children to become dynamic, independent learners.

Learning and Development:

The Infant Community and School plan separately but around the same theme, ensuring that activities are age appropriate. On the occasion of the second re-accreditation visit there was an overarching theme of transport, looking specifically at water transport. The themes also reflect various cultural events. All weekly activities are fully evaluated.

In the Infant Community each key person observes the children in their group daily and uses these observations to complete a Key Child Focused Planning Sheet. The key person then uses this information, as well as the parental comments in each child's 'Complete Guide', to plan appropriate activities for the following week. These 'Complete Guides' contain photos and observations which are linked to the Prime Areas of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) and they are sent home at the end of each week. Staff also track children's activities during the day; these observations are evaluated from the practitioner's point of view as well as the



children's. This takes the form of a document that records the activity or resources that each child has chosen to work with, how they enjoyed it and what the practitioner could do to improve the activity and/or challenge the children further to promote their learning. Detailed reports are written every six months, recording the children's progress in line with the EYFS Development Matters and also include, when appropriate, mandatory two years old assessments.

Planning, recording and assessment in the School follows a similar pattern, but with an Individual Development Plan made for each key child on a monthly, rather than a weekly, basis. Plans are made based on daily observations and reflect a child's particular interests at the time. The School classrooms use the Montessori curriculum to deliver the EYFS framework and, again, links are made to this framework in the 'Complete Guides'. As in the Infant Community, reports are written every six months. The setting also keeps a separate record of the Montessori activities that have been presented. Daily tracking of children's activities also takes place and these are carried out by all staff working with this age group.

Children in the School have the use of the back garden, which they use as an extension to their indoor environment, as well as the front garden for more physical play. The Infant Community children are taken out to the front garden in small groups during the course of the day. The 2½ hour work cycle in the morning gives children plenty of time to explore both environments and this is mirrored again in the afternoon session.

New Park is able to support children with EAL and provision is in place for those with SEND; there is a designated Special Educational Needs Officer (SENCO).

The processes of daily evaluation and reflection ensure that appropriate activities are offered to the children and that the adults in the setting support their use of the learning environment; as such, this fulfils the recommendation made during the previous MEAB accreditation to ensure the use of a more consistent form of planning that includes full evaluation and reflection of learning.

Prepared Environment: resources and materials

The indoor environment is very well resourced. The premises are bright, with plenty of natural light. There is a narrow staircase leading down from the secure front door; at the bottom are the children's coat pegs and, opposite these, space for the children to place their outdoor shoes and change into their indoor shoes.

From the cloakroom is a door leading to the Infant Community, which is located in the front room on the lower ground floor of the premises. It is furnished with a wooden stair/ramp to aid physical development, a home corner, book corner, a large, soft mat for babies to sleep or lie on, a construction area with hollow wooden blocks and low shelves full of treasure baskets and other heuristic resources containing a variety of shapes and textures. Other shelves contain some sorting and grading activities, appropriate for this age group and a shelf of basic Activities for Everyday Living (AEL), such as pouring and transferring as well as dressing frames, for those children ready to begin the transition to the School rooms; these are rotated on a regular basis. There are several tables and chairs for those children who are able to sit unsupported. There is always some kind of messy play activity on offer and this changes throughout the day in order to engage even the youngest child. On the day of the second re-accreditation visit, this



included water play, sand play and exploring the texture of shaving foam. Since the previous MEAB accreditation, the layout of the Infant Community room has been changed to allow children the freedom to access all areas of learning within this room.

A door at the back of the Infant room leads into a small vestibule where there are cupboards storing spare materials and resources, an office and children's toilets and nappy changing area. Leading off the vestibule is a small room housing the Literacy materials for the older children and this is furnished with a table and chairs. Behind a secure stair gate are the kitchen and laundry. Next to this is another large room in which can be found a variety of AEL activities, with plenty of tables and chairs for the children to use, and this room also includes a snack area. At the back of this room doors lead out onto the courtyard back garden. There are a further two rooms used by the School that are directly off the larger room; one contains Numeracy and Sensorial material and the other, Understanding the World and creative resources. A set of sliding doors at the side of this room also leads out on to the back garden.

Both the Infant Community room and School rooms are clean and well maintained, with all activities and resources in very good order.

The front garden has a large flower bed that the children help to maintain and in which they grow various plants. There is also a buggy store as well as an art and craft table, water tray, tactile materials such as pine cones and large pieces of bamboo, and an open-sided pyramid structure that is used in a variety of ways, for example as a book tent with books and cushions. There are scooters and tricycles available for the children to use that promote their gross motor skills. Members of staff take turns in preparing this environment for the benefit of the children and endeavour to relate provision to the weekly theme, as well as reflect the areas of the EYFS framework.

Following the first re-accreditation visit, staff have added more resources to the courtyard garden at the back. The children have been busy planting a variety of herbs, bulbs and salad vegetables, some of which have already been harvested. On the occasion of the second visit, the children were planting more lettuce. There are resources available for scrubbing and washing activities, painting, nature study and a small book corner. The children also enjoy preparing snack outside, as well as taking out resources from the indoor classrooms. The children use this outdoor space regularly and there is a retractable cover which provides shelter from rain or sun. Planning resources and activities for the courtyard will remain on the school's development plan, as staff continue to develop their ideas.

Overall, the setting offers a very good range of engaging activities and resources, both inside and outdoors, that help to promote learning.

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

Children at New Park Montessori exhibit a high degree of independence. Those in the Infant Community are encouraged to choose their own activities and tidy up after themselves; they are able to choose when they want a drink or snack and staff allow them time to put on their shoes and coats, assisting when necessary.

Children in the School rooms are able to complete a cycle of activity, follow the ground rules



and generally work independently at their own pace. They also help themselves to snack or a drink, as required, during the course of the day.

Parents are verbally encouraged to facilitate children's independence at home and by means of suggestions given in the 'Complete Guide' or at the parents evenings that are held regularly.

Children in all areas of the setting have complete freedom to choose who to work with and where within their age grouping, and, during the course of the both re-accreditation visits, most of the activities observed were child-initiated with adults supporting when necessary, especially in the Infant Community. The children are allowed ample opportunity to repeat activities as often as they wish.

The staff role model sensitive and courteous behaviour throughout the day and the children have a helpful and respectful attitude to each other. Children show respect for their environment by putting activities back on the shelves. They also care for the plants and feed the fish at the setting.

Montessori practice: Classroom management

Children arrive at the nursery from 07.30 onwards for breakfast, which is served in the Infant Community room and which allows children from the School rooms to mix with the younger children. Since the first re-accreditation visit, staff have reflected on various procedures and have slightly altered the start of the work cycle. This is to allow for the later arrival of some of the children; the work cycle now begins in the School rooms at approximately 08.30. In the Infant Community, they have a short circle time at around 09.00 for 10 minutes; this normally consists of a greeting to each other and some songs. The children in both age ranges are free to explore and choose their own spontaneous activities or take part in individual presentations. Staff in both the Infant Community and School rooms ensure that all children have the opportunity to go into the front garden, in small groups, although children in the School rooms now tend to use the courtyard area more often during the morning session. Children move from the Infant Community to the School at 2½ years old; this is a gradual transition process with children spending a short time in the School environment, and this time is gradually increased until the child has settled into the new routine; there is no set time scale for this transition. Parents of these children are also encouraged to come into the setting and familiarize themselves with the School routine.

At approximately 11.30, the children in the Infant Community prepare for lunch. The older children help to serve each other and tidy up when finished. During this time, staff clear part of the room and lay out each child's sleeping mat. These are marked with the children's names and animal photograph – each child chooses an animal when they join and photos are placed on the coat pegs, beakers and sleep mats as a means for easy identification by the child. Children sleep for as long as they wish, but normally by 14.00 hours, all the children are awake and ready to continue the exploration of their environment. Occasionally the children are taken to a local park and the setting has the use of several double buggies in order to transport those children who are not yet walking.

The children in the School rooms continue their work cycle until approximately 11.15, when there is a short circle time; some of the children help to prepare the larger of their rooms for lunch at 11.30 by laying the tables. Several children at a time are invited to go and wash their



hands before sitting down and being served, while the others continue with circle time. Every day, two children are chosen to serve lunch to their friends; all help to tidy up at the end of the meal. This is a positive change to the lunch time procedure, making a smoother transition between the end of the morning session and lunch time. Any child in this room requiring a sleep is re-directed either to the Infant Community or to one of the School's rooms which can be sectioned off.

After lunch, the children can choose to continue working with the Montessori activities or participate in other creative activities planned by the adults. Soft music is played to help the children sleep and they are gently woken at around 14.00 hours and continue with their work cycle or take part in other activities. On the day of the second visit, children made boats out of recycled plastic bottles, which they used during the afternoon for water play activities, and some of them took part in a drama/music and movement session. All of these extracurricular activities are optional. Children are collected any time from 16.30 onwards, although some remain until 18.30.

The day runs smoothly and the adults in the setting manage the daily routines very well. There are carefully thought out policies and procedures that support these routines, which are displayed on the staff notice board.

Montessori Practice: links with parents, including reports and records

Staff maintain an effective working environment, both inside and out, during the day. Although members of each team can work with any child, the key person is responsible for maintaining records. These are updated daily, during quiet periods, and contain detailed observations along with possible lines of development.

Parents are invited to a parents' evening every six months and these are very well attended. They are given information on Montessori philosophy and have the opportunity to play with various activities and resources. They also receive a detailed report on their child's progress and regular newsletters keep them up to date with future events. They are often asked to come into the setting to run a cookery session or to tell the children something about their cultural background at festival times. Parents spoken to on the day of the re-accreditation visits gave extremely positive feedback about the setting and were particularly appreciative of the information, both written and verbal, that they receive from staff and how quickly their children had settled into the routine of the setting. They feel that they are an important part of the setting's community.

New Park has good links with local schools and a comprehensive transition document is sent to the school when children leave. This details children's progress in all areas of the EYFS framework.

Staffing:

There is a clear staff structure in place. The owner holds Early Years Professional Status as well as an Association Montessori International (AMI) Montessori Teacher Diploma and divides her time between this and her four other settings. The manager also holds an AMI Montessori



Teacher Diploma as well as a degree in Spanish and German, and has overall responsibility for the day to day running of the setting. Her main role is to support and supervise staff in the care and education provided by the setting and, although supernumerary, she takes on the role of room leader in both the Infant and School classes on a weekly basis, covering the varied staff shift patterns. She has recently joined this setting, having previously worked as manager in one of the owner's other nurseries for over two years, and is an experienced Montessori practitioner.

The head of the Infant Community has a relevant NVQ level 3 qualification and the head of School holds an AMI Montessori Teacher Diploma. Two members of staff hold Montessori Assistant Certificates, one has just completed her Montessori teaching practice, one has a level 3 childcare qualification, one a Diploma in Early Years Education, and two have degrees. The owner also employs six staff who are allocated as relief staff across her settings to cover for absences.

There are comprehensive staff induction procedures and job descriptions. Non-Montessori qualified staff are given thorough in-house training on Montessori philosophy and its practical application. There are annual appraisals in place, with staff completing a self-evaluation form that is discussed at appraisal meetings, and peer observations also feed into this process. Staff members also have regular supervision/mentoring meetings with the manager during the year that support them in their continued professional development; this practice follows a recommendation made at the previous MEAB accreditation. Regular staff meetings take place and these are minuted.

Following discussions from the appraisal meetings, staff are encouraged to attend further training organized by the local authority and by Montessori Centre International. Senior staff also arrange in-house training, which has recently included behaviour management and yoga for young children.

Staff write a 'wish list' for further resources and the purchase of major items of equipment are discussed with the owner.

Although this team has only been together in its current form for a short time, they work together extremely well, treat the children with the utmost respect and promote the Montessori ethos of 'helping me to help myself'.

Name of Assessor: Margot Best

Date of reports: First visit – 11 March 2014

Second visit – 10 June 2014