



# **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" (2012/14). 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.

### **Newpark Childcare Centre**

1 St Giles Terrace, Barbican, London EC2Y 8DU

Date of previous MEAB accreditation: November 2012

Date of first re-accreditation visit: 13 January 2016

Date of second re-accreditation visit: 19 May 2016

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

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

Newpark Childcare Centre is one of a small group of family-run nurseries that are owned and managed by three Directors. It opened in 2004 and is located in a refurbished church hall in the Barbican, next to St Giles Church. It has sole use of the premises, which include two teaching rooms: the Nursery, which is the main classroom that all the children use, and a Montessori room which is mostly used by children over 3 years old. There is also a hallway, an office, kitchen and lavatory facilities. The outdoor provision consists of a small paved area, which is part of the church grounds, and the children are taken daily to the private gardens of the Barbican Centre.

There are currently 36 children aged between 1 and 4½ years on the roll. On the day of the second visit 27 children attended all day and another joined for the afternoon. Of these, nine were under 2½ years. After an initial settling-in period all children attend a minimum of two full days, arriving up to 09.00. Newpark Childcare Centre is open for 50 weeks a year, from 07.00 to 19.00, Monday to Friday. The children are provided with hot meals and snacks.



The setting makes provision for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities, as well as for children with English as an additional language and it liaises with external agencies such as the local authority and private therapists.

The three Directors are in regular attendance but not included on the rota. One holds a Montessori diploma together with a degree and one has a diploma in nursery nursing. The setting employs eight members of staff including the manager and a chef. The manager is responsible for the day-to-day running of the setting and works four days a week, with the deputy in charge in her absence. All the teaching staff work a ten hour shift four days per week. On the day of the second visit eight members of staff were present, they worked together closely as a single team. There are additional staff employed by the group who cover for staff absence.

The manager is Montessori qualified, has NVQ Level 3 and is currently working towards a Post Diploma Observation Course. Another member of staff has a Montessori diploma and is the setting's Montessori programme co-ordinator. One member of staff is currently working towards a Foundation Degree in Early Years. Five of the practitioners hold appropriate early years qualifications: three hold level 3 qualification and two were trained by Newpark Childcare Centre.

## Summary

Newpark Childcare Centre provides a nurturing, warm and caring environment in which each child is valued and respected. The two separate classrooms are well presented and prepared according to the Montessori philosophy and are equipped appropriately for the ages and stages of the children present.

The staff work very well together and show consideration towards the children and encourage them to learn skills for independence. The staff help the children to develop a sense of responsibility, and respect for each other and their surroundings, as well as a high degree of self-discipline. There is a strong emphasis on social development, with the promotion of the Montessori ethos of grace and courtesy being a major feature in this setting.

The staff team combines the requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) and the Montessori principles effectively, skillfully linking them together in the nursery's well-established and extensive record-keeping system. The parents are very appreciative of the time taken to keep them informed and this effective partnership helps ensure that the needs of the children are met appropriately. They communicate regularly with the staff during handovers and show their commitment to the setting by providing written feedback on their child's progress along with photographs from home. They are very supportive of the nursery and are grateful for the high standard of care offered to their children.



The setting has met the recommendations from the previous MEAB accreditation and first visit to improve the nature provision indoors by bringing plants into the classroom for the children to look after, by using the impressive aquarium in the main room as an educational tool and by providing an indoor nature area. These changes have given the children many more opportunities to engage with the natural world.

Following the first visit the staff team has also changed the daily routine in order to give the children more independent access to their learning environment for a longer period, with less emphasis on whole group learning. This fully supports their needs and fosters independence and concentration. The management and team are committed to the continuous evaluation and improvement of their provision in order to build on their achievements for the benefit of all the children in their care.

***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 should consider ensuring that the children complete their cycles of activity and help keep their classroom tidy; and
- staff should ensure that the children have regular opportunities to run.

#### **Philosophy:**

The staff members at Newpark Childcare Centre fully subscribe to the Montessori method of education and implement its principles by providing the children with an interesting, diverse and age-appropriate learning experience, and by encouraging the children to develop their own unique potential. The warm and stimulating learning environment has a happy atmosphere and each child is treated as an individual. The strong emphasis on developing independence, respect and consideration for peers and for the learning environment is an outstanding feature of Newpark. Following a recommendation from the first re-accreditation visit the time for continuous and free access to the materials has been extended and the children are not obliged to attend group activities during the work cycle, which is of great benefit to the children, with a calm and industrious atmosphere now evident in the classrooms for the majority of the day. The children have more time to pursue their own needs and interests and there are more opportunities for individual teaching.

The school's aims and objectives are described on the very informative website, where there is a comprehensive explanation of the Montessori philosophy and how the school adheres to this in practice. The prospectus provides another source of information on



the Montessori method of education and staff offer many opportunities for the parents to become better informed, such as at parents meetings and through written reports.

The manager and Montessori co-ordinator lead formal monthly staff meetings and these, together with good verbal communication within this small team, offer regular opportunities to review the setting's daily procedures, planning and goals.

### **Learning and Development:**

The learning and development opportunities at Newpark Childcare Centre are very good. Staff meet regularly to discuss planning, which covers both the seven learning and development areas of the EYFS and the Montessori curriculum. Long term planning is based on the Montessori curriculum. Planning for the adult-led groups is done on a weekly basis; this includes topic work and is differentiated for each of the two age groups. Staff endeavour to ensure that the topic work is relevant and covers all areas of learning, and they use the school's surrounding facilities in full; for example, they take the children to the London Museum and have a variety of local play areas that they visit.

On a monthly basis the Montessori co-ordinator and key persons write an Individual Development Plan for each child based on observations and photographic evidence from the previous month. These plans are then reviewed again at the end of the month and each child's progress is recorded in their 'Complete Guide'. This comprehensive system ensures that the children's ages and stages of development are well catered for. All practitioners can make observation notes on any child but key persons are responsible for their own children's records. The parents take an active role and are involved with their children's planning and progress from the moment they start at the setting. Overall, the record keeping at Newpark is very comprehensive; it combines the EYFS areas of learning effectively with the Montessori curriculum and tracks children's progress very effectively. Any additional needs are easily identified and catered for, with support from the setting's special educational needs and/or disabilities co-ordinator and from outside agencies when necessary.

Staff enable the children to enjoy time for independent learning by providing a diverse range of activities and allowing them to choose freely. As the setting has met the recommendation from the first re-accreditation visit more of the child's learning is self-initiated now, with less emphasis on planned group activities, which has extended their opportunity for spontaneous activity, deep involvement and creativity.

### **Prepared Environment:**

The outstanding indoor environment is very welcoming and well maintained. Although there is little natural light, the rooms feel bright and airy and the best use is made of the space available. The Nursery room is large and its areas of learning are clearly defined. There is a designated place for meals, which is also used for messy and



creative play at other times. A quiet area has cushions and coracles for the children to sleep in when they need to. There is also a block play area. The role-play provision is rotated in response to the children's needs and interests; on the day of the first re-accreditation visit it was set up as a home corner. This area was very popular and two children were observed preparing a party for their 'babies', with cake and stories. They made a carrot cake with the role-play materials and knew what ingredients they needed and how old their babies were. This scenario was an excellent example of children consolidating their learning independently through representational play. On the day of the second visit some of the older children were able to help set up this area for an extra snack and prepare it themselves, giving them real experiences in their role play. A small group of children in another area were making real bread with a member of staff for eating later.

Children under 3 years of age are very well catered for with suitable materials for their ages and stages of learning; particular emphasis is placed on the use of treasure baskets and activities for heuristic play, as well as other appropriate natural materials. All the activities in the teaching rooms are changed regularly in response to the children's needs and interests.

The smaller teaching room, known as the Montessori room, houses the more advanced Montessori materials and is also divided into separate areas of learning. The staff make the best use of the space they have available to them. The older children have free access to the more advanced Montessori materials in this room and the younger children can access this room with full supervision.

Plants and cut flowers are in evidence in the main classroom and, following the first re-accreditation visit, there is now a permanent nature table. On the day of the second re-accreditation visit a child stood for a prolonged period of time investigating the different natural objects on a tray, using a magnifying glass to examine the objects very closely. One of the outstanding features of this school is its enormous fish tank, which is divided into three separate sections and takes up a whole wall. It not only provides visual interest, but also a strong link with the natural world. Following a recommendation from the first visit, staff have broadened the use of this provision by providing the children with pairing cards so all can now identify the fish and coral species. This wonderful feature is now a useful learning tool. The topic of the week during the second visit also linked to this, as it was 'under the sea'. One of the activities available in the morning was melting ice cubes and there was a water-based 'fishing' activity for the children in the afternoon.

The setting has direct access to the gated remembrance/cemetery garden belonging to the church. It consists of a paved area and has raised flowerbeds for the children to use to grow vegetables and flowers. This garden can be used for group activities, although the children's free access to it is weather-dependent and is restricted. The church management limits the range of activities they will permit as it is a remembrance garden and is to be used for quiet activities only. The children's access to, and use of, this area during the work cycle is currently being reviewed by the newly-appointed manager. Staff members ensure that the children have daily access to the outdoors – either to this



garden or to local parks – and it is recommended that they remain mindful of the children’s need to run around freely outside the classroom.

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

There are many opportunities for the children to develop their skills for independence at Newpark. They show a very good level of respect for the prepared environment and readily respond to the expectations of those who work with them. Staff deployment is excellent and, because all the children use the main Nursery room, communication between the adults is regular and effective. As there is now more opportunity for free and spontaneous choice during the extended work cycles, all the children can follow their inner guides and benefit fully from the carefully prepared learning environment that encourages their independence, decision-making and self-control. It is recommended that staff consistently encourage the children to fully complete their cycles of activity and help tidy up after themselves.

Children work together well, making friends and learning to respect each other by taking turns and helping each other. Grace and courtesy lessons are offered regularly throughout the day and strong emphasis is placed on developing social skills.

Snack arrangements work well, a rolling snack is offered to the older children in the hallway, to take when they choose, and younger children share snack together in the main Nursery room. Transition to lunch is currently managed with the children being in their two respective age groups. Even the very young children are encouraged to help themselves at mealtimes, which is an outstanding feature of the school; they are given an appropriate range of choices and are encouraged to feed themselves and clear their own plates. The children are also encouraged to manage their own clothes and footwear.

Staff liaise with parents at evening meetings, via the website and face-to-face. Parents are very supportive of the practice and appreciate the setting’s efforts to promote their children’s independence; they endeavour to continue this good practice at home.

### **Montessori practice: Classroom management**

Classroom management is very good, with some excellent aspects of practice. Children arrive any time between 07.00 and 09.00 and all the children attend for a full day. Breakfast is offered up to 09.00, and the children can access the learning materials as soon as they arrive. Care should be taken to ensure that the ground rules are applied in all indoor areas by encouraging the children to put their materials away when they have finished working with them, and running in the classroom should be discouraged.

Staff and children begin to tidy the room and prepare for lunch at around 11.00, and all



are encouraged to join in this activity if they wish to. A group is then offered, although the children are able to carry on with their own pursuits if they prefer. Lunch is a lively affair. The younger children eat in the Nursery room and the older ones use the Montessori room. A hot lunch is cooked on the premises by the chef. The children are well supervised as the staff sit and eat with them.

One of the many outstanding features of this setting is the way the staff manage to settle the children to sleep after lunch. The length of the afternoon work cycle depends on how long the children sleep for and when they are collected to go home. Afternoon sessions run similarly to those of the morning, with children having free access to the indoor learning materials.

On the day of the first and second re-accreditation visits the children were divided into two groups for their trip out to the excellent Barbican gardens, which are a short walk away from the school building. The younger ones visited in the morning, and the older ones went in the afternoon. The setting really makes the most of the many and varied local facilities, including daily visits to places such as the private gardens, the Museum of London, and local markets, as well as the neighbouring church. Additional activities such as yoga, drama and dance generally take place in the afternoon, and opportunities are found during the day for introducing the children to different languages. On the day of the first visit the same song was sung in three different languages. As well as cooking the children's meals, the chef gives the children cookery lessons in the afternoons, and these are very popular.

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

Links with parents are outstanding. Each child is allocated two key persons as the full time teaching staff all work four long days per week. Care is taken to match the children with staff who attend on their particular days and this works very well. The main key person is responsible for keeping the children's records up to date and for liaising with parents on a daily basis. Staff take great care to make time to talk to family members and carers. The parents therefore feel very well supported and fully appreciate the effort made to keep them informed; they are aware of their children's progress and of the varied programme that is offered. The two parents evenings each year provide an opportunity for the parents to meet each other as well as talk to the staff.

The setting distributes informative newsletters and extensive information via its website, including a regularly updated blog (accessible to parents via a password protected web link). The child's record-keeping book, the 'Complete Guide', is sent home every week to keep parents informed of their child's progress and for their contributions. Both staff and parents augment these records by including many informative photographs and comments. The parents also receive a written report every six months, which will include the statutory two year old progress check or a transition document for a child's next school when appropriate. These records and assessments are very comprehensive, cover all areas of learning and are compiled by the child's key person in collaboration



with parents. The staff also record a DVD of a child's day on their birthday, which is given as a gift to the family. This DVD shows the children having fun and learning while they are at the setting. Parents report that they are delighted with the way their children are looked after and are very appreciative of the communication they have with the practitioners.

### **Staffing:**

A committed and diligent team manages the setting. The Directors support the manager and together they have overall responsibility for the setting. The present manager has recently been appointed and came from another nursery school in the group. The team is well qualified and, while only two members of staff who work regularly with the children are Montessori trained, care is taken to ensure that all the staff have a sound knowledge of this method of education through the provision of extensive in-house training. There are many opportunities for continuous professional development, both in and beyond the setting. The learning outcomes of training are shared amongst the team effectively and, when appropriate, changes are put into practice. Staff questionnaires also give the management team valuable insight into their staff's opinions regarding the operation of the nursery, and these are used as a tool for quality assessment and improvement. Peer on peer observations take place and are considered during the quarterly supervision sessions initiated by the manager, with support from the deputy. Annual appraisals are conducted by the Directors.

The staff induction process is comprehensive and new members of staff feel very well supported by the management. One of the outstanding features of this setting is the way the team work cohesively and share information. Formal minuted meetings are held once a month but the staff share information effectively every day. They also have a unique opportunity to visit the other settings in the group and there are seven additional members of staff across the group who are able to cover any absences. The notice boards are very informative, showing photographs of all the staff and their responsibilities.

The ethos of Newpark Childcare Centre promotes happy and active children who are keen to learn and who are treated with respect and valued as individuals. The setting's decision to apply for MEAB re-accreditation is a further indication of its dedication to continuous improvement and to the provision of a high quality Montessori environment.

Name of Assessor: Charlotte White

Date report submitted: First visit – 15 January 2016

Second visit – 19 May 2016