



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.

St Matthew’s Montessori School

St Matthew’s Church Hall, North Common Road, London W5 2QA

Date of the first accreditation visit: 6 February 2014

Date of the second accreditation visit: 19 May 2014

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

Description of the school

St Matthew’s Montessori School was first registered in 1982, and then re-registered as a private nursery by Willow Tree Education Ltd in 2006. The school is located by Ealing Common, in the London Borough of Ealing, and operates from one main room. It also has the use of a large vestry for planned group activities and there is a small kitchen area adjacent to the main hall. The school has sole use of the building during its hours of operation and packs away every day. The nursery also has lavatory facilities and there is an office area within the main hall. Outside, a grassed, fenced area runs along two sides of the church, which the children can access from the front of the building.

The nursery makes provision for children with special educational needs as well as children with English as an additional language (EAL). It works with external agencies such as the local authority and private therapists. There are currently 34 children aged between 2 and 5 years on the roll. On the day of the second accreditation visit 27 children attended in the morning and 13 in the afternoon, with one attending just for the afternoon.

The school offers sessions every morning and afternoon during term time; the morning sessions are from 9.15 to 12.15 and the afternoon sessions are 12.20 to 15.15. Children who attend all day bring their own lunch.

The manager is responsible for the day to day running of the school. The owner, who attends



on different days each week, supports her. Including these two, there are seven members of staff working directly with the children. Five hold a Montessori teaching diploma, one a Montessori certificate and the other member of staff also has an appropriate childcare certificate. Three members of the team work full time and four work on a part-time basis, including the manager and owner. Five peripatetic teachers come in to offer a wide range of specialist activities including PE, drama, music, computer skills and ballet. Currently some French is spoken during lunch times as well as during an optional activity for the children in the morning.

Summary

St Matthew's Montessori School is spacious and well equipped, especially for its older children. Parents speak highly of the setting. They are particularly happy with the way the children settle and learn contentedly in this organized, child-friendly environment. As well as the prepared indoor environment, the school utilizes the church vestry and the surrounding garden area.

The owner and manager consistently seek ways to improve the school and recognize the value of continued professional development for the staff, who work very well as a team and are excellent role models for the children in their care. They obviously enjoy working with the children. The ethos of the school promotes happy and active children who are keen to learn, are treated with respect, and valued as individuals. There are many opportunities for the children to develop independence, especially as the length of the work cycle and the meal time routines have been re-considered.

The team have worked successfully on the recommendations from the first visit and staff training, which will cover working with younger children, has been scheduled for the next academic year. In order to strengthen the good practice already in place, careful consideration should be given to the recommendations made during the second accreditation visit. The team work very well together 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:

- To review the record keeping process and its consistent application by all members of the team; including evaluative statements and longer narrative and tracking observations in all children's records.
- The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) areas of learning should be linked with the Montessori curriculum in these records.



Philosophy:

The staff at St Matthew's Montessori School demonstrate a strong commitment to Montessori philosophy, which is reflected in their practice. They recognize the importance of freedom and independence within a well-prepared environment. The aim of the setting is to create a calm, productive atmosphere where each child develops a love of learning and skills for the future. Each child is treated as an individual, with the objective of helping them to build confidence and self-discipline. The open and friendly atmosphere created gives the children the space to flourish in their learning and development. The children are settled, happy, confident and motivated and the activities offered to them are challenging.

The school's principles, together with a detailed overview of Montessori educational philosophy, are clearly set out in the literature given to parents and on the website. Termly reviews of Montessori principles and practice are carried out, primarily by the owner and her manager, and are shared annually with the staff. The importance of a good working relationship with parents is evident. Parents are considered to be partners and provide useful information to help staff monitor the children's learning and development successfully.

Classroom procedures and staff team details are clearly displayed on the school's notice board and in the information parents receive. The parents are made aware of the planning, recording and assessment processes and are very happy with the amount of contact they have with the school.

Learning and Development:

St Matthew's Montessori provides an excellent range of child-focused materials and activities which now closely reflect the needs of all the children in the school. The school has children who are under 2½ years old and, following the recommendation from the first visit, more focus has been given to the provision of materials for them. Making more sensory materials available all the time would further benefit these younger children.

As the children are based in one room the staff plan the environment and activities together. Their long term planning is reflected in the prepared learning environment, where all Montessori curriculum and EYFS areas are covered. All the staff are involved in long and medium term planning for the children's activities and projects. The child's key person, using their observations, prepares extensive short term planning for the children, and completes the mandatory two year check for the relevant aged children with the help of their parents.

The key person system is very well established and the children make good progress, helped by attentive and respectful staff. It is recommended that the team continue to review the children's Learning Journals and record keeping to ensure consistency of approach across the team when planning, observing, assessing and recording children's progress.

The work cycle, both in the morning and afternoon, has been extended to 2¾ hours as the children no longer have group activities and have open access to the garden throughout the day. The staff have worked well together and the re-organization of the daily routine has given the children many more opportunities for spontaneous, child-led learning. The children are now more settled and are able to extend their work without interruption.



The staff capably support children with additional needs by involving the parents, providing increased adult support in adapting activities and ensuring that the necessary help is in place, and by liaising with outside agencies.

The children have recently benefited from being able to observe live chicks hatching from their eggs in an incubator. Parents have adopted two of these chicks so everyone will be able to see them grow. This has been fun and interesting for the adults as well as the children and it demonstrates the partnership in place between home and school.

Prepared Environment: resources and materials

The large hall is set up each morning. Resources are organized into Montessori curriculum areas of learning and are generally of good quality. The management team is in the process of replacing some of the older materials. There is an extensive range of Montessori materials, which are changed to follow project work and the children's needs. Additional resources augment the Montessori provision, including a well-stocked art area, and there are ample resources to ensure that all areas of learning are available for children to access in a group or on their own.

The activities provided in the hall reflect the interests of the children and are changed regularly. Staff are efficient at working as a team in supporting children should they choose to work in different areas of the setting.

Following the first accreditation visit changes have been made in the main hall to accommodate the younger children more fully. The classroom is well presented and now better reflects the age and stages of learning of all the children who attend. The provision of treasure baskets and an emphasis on heuristic play, as well as more natural materials, could bring further benefits. However, the area has been well thought out with the younger children in mind, which helps all the children at St Matthew's to become more independent and fulfilled learners.

The children have a fish to look after and cut flowers on their nature table. There are two outside areas adjacent to the building that make up the garden, and a large shed which contains activities to be used outdoors. One area is mainly grass and flowerbeds, while the other is mainly paved with large flowerbeds on either side. Good use is now made of the outside area and the church vestry. The activities provided in the garden cover all areas of learning comprehensively in natural surroundings. The vestry has been set up effectively as a separate area, with apparatus to promote the children's gross motor skills. The children can access both these areas during the work cycle in the morning and afternoon.

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

Comprehensive strategies have been put in place to foster the children's independence. They show a high level of respect for the prepared environment and readily respond to the expectations of those who work with them. The staff trust the children to work on their own or in small groups, and they are given the opportunity to join pre-arranged activities like painting should they wish to.



The well-informed adults offer them a choice of activities and ensure they remain engaged by directing the children to different resources when necessary. The children are shown how to handle the materials and equipment and look after their environment. Following the recommendation from the first accreditation visit a new routine for accessing the garden during the morning and afternoon work cycles has been established. The children are now able to go into the garden whenever they want throughout these periods. This has given them more freedom to choose their activity and work at their own pace for longer, inside or out. The children learn independently and at their own pace during the whole, uninterrupted work cycle, guided by the adults looking after them.

The children now also have access to a snack table throughout the day. During the visits water, milk and bread sticks were on offer. The children help themselves and pour their own drinks into plastic cups. The children access this area independently, with adult supervision only when they need it; this has increased their independence. Washing up facilities have been provided for the children in the afternoon and it is intended that these are going to be available in the morning too. Plates have now been provided for lunch, albeit plastic ones rather than china. Continuous access to washing up facilities would give the children the opportunity to respect and use the snack area more effectively. The children help to keep the classroom clean by wiping spills and sweeping when necessary.

Staff are very consistent and respectful in their approach to behaviour, especially in their use of appropriate and encouraging language.

Montessori practice: Classroom management

Excellent communication between the staff members ensures that they all have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities. Staff move around the classroom as they are needed but work mainly with their key children. The children enjoy the benefits of vertical grouping during both the morning and afternoon sessions. Presentations of the materials are given predominantly during the first half of the session in the morning and as and when they are needed during the rest of the day. The younger children have to attend at least three morning sessions a week and the older children attend at least five sessions a week. Each key person is therefore able to work with their key children consistently. The key person role is delegated effectively in the event of staff absence.

The morning and afternoon work cycles have been significantly extended to about 2¾ hours. This has been achieved by making the group activities optional and incorporating the use of the garden within the sessions. This has made a major difference to the length of time that the children can concentrate on self-selected activities, working at their own pace. It has given them time for more in-depth learning. The staff have worked imaginatively to implement this change and are very pleased with the new routine, as they can see the benefit that it has brought to the children.

Children who stay all day bring a lunch box and the adults sit with the children while they are eating. French is spoken by a native French speaker at lunch, which the children enjoy. The lunch experience has been improved as the children have been provided with plates and now all start eating at the same time. Cushions and a blanket are provided for the children should they need to sleep during the day.



Classroom procedures and staff responsibilities are clearly described on the school's notice board and in the information parents receive. The staff team has now devised a very effective system to ensure that all adults know how many children have arrived at school each day.

Montessori Practice: links with parents, including reports and records

When the children start at St Matthew's Montessori the parents help the staff complete the mandatory two year check. Coffee mornings and parents' evenings are organized and the parents fill out an All About Me form that enables them to pass on information about their child's interests and needs, and which helps them feel involved right from the start. The parents also use a form when their children have achieved a special milestone, which they share with the setting. Open communication is encouraged and staff are available at the beginning and end of each session to speak to parents and carers, whose contributions are valued and encouraged. Comprehensive information is also available on the school's notice board. Parents are also aware of the recording and assessment process and are kept very well informed of their child's progress.

Detailed records are kept of the children's progress in their individual files. The key person is responsible for checking that observations are carried out, but all staff contribute to this process. While the record keeping is comprehensive and informative, it lacks evaluative comment. When the key person has updated the children's records they are discussed with the whole team to share experience and knowledge, which works well. It is recommended that the team review the style and content of the children's record keeping and observations to ensure consistency of approach, the clear incorporation of the Montessori curriculum with the EYFS areas within the records, and the inclusion of evaluative statements and longer narrative and tracking observations. This will help all staff record every child's progress and achievements more effectively.

The constant flow of relevant information between the child's key person and the parents ensures that the care provided is appropriate and consistent. This is also facilitated by the parents having access to the children's record keeping and the 'Red book' that travels backwards and forwards between home and school as and when necessary. The parents are also able to comment in the records themselves while they are at the school and the open door policy enables parents to pass on their views and comments at any time for consideration.

Parents and family members are welcome to share their skills and knowledge with the children.

Reports are sent to the next school when the children leave and the parents are given the children's Learning Journals to read as an ongoing record of learning and development.

Staffing:

The owner is fully intent on developing the existing good practice and demonstrates a profound commitment to the school, while delegating the day to day running to her manager. The manager is well qualified and holds a Montessori diploma as well as a degree. Three other teaching staff hold a level 4 Montessori qualification and one has level 2. Another member of the teaching team has an appropriate child care certificate. The owner, who attends on different



days each week, has Qualified Teacher Status as well as a Montessori diploma. Ideas and initiatives for development are welcomed from staff, parents and the local authority. The staff attend relevant courses as and when necessary. Following a recommendation from the first visit the manager and another member of staff intend to follow a Montessori course during the forthcoming academic year that covers the needs of the younger children.

The staff have very successfully extended the work cycle. The manager has worked hard and has been creative in implementing the recommendations.

The induction procedure is effective and the member of staff who joined recently has felt very well supported. Job descriptions and a peer observation system are in place, the appraisal process is well established and a staff supervision procedure has been implemented. There is a written staffing structure, the management is effective, and teamwork is evident. Most of the staff have worked together for many years and there is a strong sense of cohesion amongst them. Roles such as SENCo are delegated to members of the team.

The small size of the team makes communication direct and informal. Weekly staff meetings take place, minutes are written and kept on the premises. Clear understanding of roles and responsibilities, and the owner's receptive attitude to her staff and their suggestions, all make for a happy team. Key persons monitor the curriculum and the children's development records to ensure that individual needs are catered for; all staff have input in the planning and their ideas are valued. Funds are allocated for new resources as and when they are needed.

Name of Assessor: Charlotte White

Date of reports: First visit – 9th February 2014
Second visit – 20th May 2014