



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) and subsequent +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.

Little Peoples Montessori Nursery

St Pauls Community Hall, Magdalen Road, Norwich NR3 4LN

Date of the first accreditation visit: 9 May 2014

Date of second accreditation visit: 15 August 2014

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

Description of the school

Little Peoples Montessori is a small, privately owned, city nursery providing education and care for children aged 2 to 5 years. It is open from 08.00 to 18.00, Monday to Thursday and 08.00 to 16.00 on Friday, for 50 weeks of the year. Full time and sessional places are available.

The nursery, established in 2003, is housed in a converted church, of which it has sole use. It consists of a large open plan classroom, with a separate kitchen area, office, cloakroom, designated adult and children's toilets and access to two large, secure outside areas. Breakfast, hot lunch and tea are prepared on the premises using food sourced locally.

The nursery is registered for 30 children and currently has 42 on roll. The nursery is able to support children with English as an additional language and children with speech and language delay.

Including the two owner/managers, there are five full time members of staff and four part-time. Seven hold appropriate early years qualifications to a minimum level 3, with five of these, including the managers, holding Montessori diplomas.



Summary

Little People's Montessori's aim is to create an environment which is stimulating, educational and nurturing for the children, their families and members of staff, so that success is achieved for each individual. This aim is upheld well and is a great strength of the setting.

The nursery is highly effective in meeting the needs of all children in their care, through recognising and celebrating their unique individuality. All staff are enthusiastic and dedicated. They work as an extremely strong team, and show respect for each other and the children in their care through consistently and diligently carrying out their roles and duties.

Excellent procedures are in place to evaluate the strengths and further development of the nursery as a whole. A recommendation from the first visit was to develop a system of peer observations, to help less experienced staff gain from the knowledge and good practice of more experienced staff, and to help all staff recognise and celebrate their own strengths and areas for development. Staff have now experimented with various systems for peer observations and have worked together to produce a format that all staff feel comfortable using. They have found the process to be a very positive experience and are keen to further develop it to include different observational techniques.

Extremely positive relationships are developed with parents, who are delighted with the information they receive on the progress of their child

The school provides an education in accordance with the principles of the Montessori approach and environment and merits accreditation by the Montessori Evaluation and Accreditation Board.

- The school should continue to reflect on its practice in order to ensure that high standards are maintained.
- Closer links should be made between the nursery's Montessori checklist and the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) learning and development guidelines.

Philosophy:

The quality of Montessori provision at Little People's Montessori is outstanding. Their aim is to create a homely, stimulating environment, where the child's natural curiosity and willingness to learn is supported by caring and attentive staff.

The open plan room allows every child freedom to access all areas of learning. Staff move throughout the environment to follow the children's individual interests, to promote their growing independence and to harness their unique potential to learn and progress. For children who are unable to express their needs verbally, staff share observations and make changes to the environment to cater for their emerging needs. For example, a recent focus has been to broaden activities in the practical life area to promote fine motor skills and support problem solving.

From the moment they start at the nursery, every child is encouraged to recognise their own



needs and the needs of those around them. Staff encourage the children to contribute ideas for the lunch menus and activities they would like on the shelves or outside; a recent example of this is the permanent provision of bikes, cars and a new slide in the garden.

Staff and older children gently remind the younger children throughout the day of the classroom rules, such as walking indoors and respecting the materials and another's work space. Great emphasis is placed on older children acting as guides to the younger children; they are at liberty to present materials and they model positive language and appropriate behaviour. They help younger children take off and put on their coats, wash their hands and keep the classroom ordered.

The children are confident and secure within the nursery. They welcome visitors, greet them and ask their name if they are unknown to them.

The nursery's philosophy of creating an environment for success for each individual is well expressed on their website, in the staff and parent handbook and on the information board, and staff review their ethos and practice on a regular basis.

Learning and Development:

The open plan room is arranged into areas of learning consistent with the Montessori curriculum. Low level shelving units and child-sized tables and chairs act to divide the room into different areas of learning. In the middle of the room is a spacious floor area with a white elliptical line of tape on the carpet. This acts as an orientation point for group activities and circle time.

In the cloakroom area there is a photograph of each child to show where their coat peg and box for their shoes is located. Children arrive at Little People's Montessori from 08.00. Breakfast is available until 09.00 for those who wish to partake. Children immediately start to select activities from the shelves, with staff available to guide and support these choices. When children finish an activity they return it to the correct place on the shelf, ready for another child to use. The cycles of activity continue until 11.00, when those who wish to can participate in the group activity. Children are free to join or leave the group activity as they wish.

In good weather the door to the outside areas is open at all times. In inclement weather it is opened as and when children wish to access the outside. It is also opened for a set period after lunch during the transition between the morning and afternoon work cycles.

Through planning and co-ordination with outside agencies and parents, the nursery is able to support children with additional needs and those with English as an additional language.

The nursery operates a well-considered key person system. As some staff are part-time they also operate a co-worker system to ensure continuous and consistent planning for every child. Each child's key person plans activities for them using a Montessori checklist and records progress on this checklist weekly; they also use a blue book to plan and record observations on a daily basis. Observations and photographs are collated in each child's "Great Book" and are linked by page headers to the EYFS areas of learning.

After the first visit it was recommended that closer links are made between the Montessori



checklist and the EYFS framework to inform planning and record progress, and that the observations in the child's "Great Book" fully reflect the Montessori philosophy and areas of learning. Staff now use a web-based tracking and planning program, which includes parental access to photos, reports and next steps.

The introduction of the two year old mandatory check enables staff to celebrate a child's progress and achievements with parents in the form of an informal meeting and a written report titled "Look what I can do at 2 years old!" This report details prime areas of development, with next steps planning, and space for parents to comment.

Staff constantly review and assess the effectiveness of the children's learning and progress. Strong team work helps staff plan for the areas of the provision that they are responsible for, so that they meet the current developmental needs of the children. There are no set topics or themes; planning and daily practice is based purely on each child's needs and interests.

Prepared Environment: resources and materials

Little Peoples Montessori offers a bright and stimulating learning environment. The open plan room feels spacious and inviting, with well defined areas of learning consistent with the Montessori curriculum.

Low level shelving, accessible to the children, houses a good range of high quality Montessori equipment and supplementary material. Additional activities prepared by staff are of an excellent quality and standard. The nursery has a wealth of resources to draw on, so materials are regularly changed and adapted to meet the needs and interests of the children.

Staff have areas of the classroom they are responsible for; this includes the day to day management of the environment to ensure materials are complete and ready for use, as well as planning and resourcing new activities.

The two outside areas are planned and prepared with as much diligence as inside. The front area is the natural garden, with vegetable beds, flowers, trees and grass areas. The back garden is covered with artificial grass and has equipment to develop gross motor skills, along with sensory panels, constructions for imaginative play and a raised pond with a solar fountain.

Staff take pride in the preparation of the environment and this includes their role within it. They are aware that they are an important part of the prepared environment and this is reflected in their practice and interaction with the children and each other. It is a pleasure to observe the nursery in action: there is a sense of calm and tranquility along with much purposeful activity.

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

From the moment the child enters the nursery their independence is fostered. The design of the cloakroom supports this; the low level pegs and benches are arranged so that there is enough floor space, allowing them the freedom to learn the skills necessary to put on coats and change shoes.



A partitioned area to left of the main room has three low level toilet cubicles with hand washing facilities. This promotes independence in self-care as children do not need to be accompanied to use these facilities. The children are also able to have access to the kitchen to cut their fruit for snack and return their plates once they have finished meals.

The work cycle begins from the moment the children arrive, be that for the morning or the afternoon sessions. Staff position themselves at the work tables or on the floor, so that children can follow their own initiative to begin work and spontaneously access the materials. Staff unobtrusively guide and support the children throughout the session. They do not stay in any one area of the room or only work with their key children; they all carefully observe and respond to the needs of the children and each other. This strong teamwork gives the room a calm atmosphere and fosters trust and respect for each other and the needs of the children.

The design of the room allows for the freedom to move from one learning area to another, as well as a spacious area in the middle of the room where children can work with a mat on the floor. There is plenty of room for children to work in small groups on the same activity, or to sit companionably close to another child while they work on their own activity.

The routine of the day allows children the freedom to repeat an activity as often as they wish, to join in an activity or just to observe. On the first visit a younger child was taking his snack at the time the dance teacher arrived for the group session. He sat at the table eating his orange, watching and joining in with hand movements. When he finished, he took his plate to the kitchen area, washed his hands, went to a shelf and took an activity to a table. When he finished he returned this exercise to the shelf and joined in the movement class.

During the morning work cycle the door to the outside area is opened and children are free to access this. The outside area is designed to offer different learning experiences to those inside; this enhances the opportunities for freedom and spontaneous learning.

After lunch children who need to rest go to their mattress and sleep. They decide when they need to rest, be it immediately after they finish lunch, or after they play outside.

Staff communicate daily with parents and carers at drop off and pick up. This develops close relationships built on trust and respect for the holistic development of the children. Importance is placed on an inclusive environment for all parents, carers and children, regardless of need, background or culture. Two-way communication ensures close co operation, so that home and nursery have the same purpose in mind, that of the needs and development of the child.

Montessori practice: Classroom management

The nursery has two work cycles every day, and additional time during which the children can freely access the materials between 16.00 and 18.00 on Mondays to Thursdays.

Breakfast is available until 09.00, and water and fruit is available all day. Every child has their own drinking bottle, labeled with their photograph. Staff ensure that these water bottles are refreshed regularly and cleaned at the end of the day.

At 11.00 children can participate in the group activity if they wish. A different group activity is



offered every day, and they include French, ballet, yoga, and music and movement groups. This is followed by a short circle time before lunch. A hot lunch, prepared on the premises, is served at midday. Children set the tables and serve the vegetables. Staff sit with the children to model good eating behaviour and encourage and support the children to try different foods. This also provides the opportunity to discuss healthy lifestyles and choices.

Children who need to take a rest during the afternoon have an allocated area of the room where the lights can be dimmed without affecting the work of other children. Each child has a mattress and blanket and their own comforter if required. Allocated staff remain with the children while they sleep and all children are reminded that this is now quiet time.

Children who do not need to rest have the opportunity to go outside. Parents collect children who only attend the morning from the outside area (weather permitting); this is an ideal opportunity for communicating with their child's key person whilst their child is engaged in other activities. Children arriving for the afternoon session join those outside.

At 13.00 the afternoon work cycle begins. Children immediately start selecting activities off the shelves, with staff supporting and guiding their choices as in the morning. Children who only attend the afternoon session are collected at 16.00, when the full day care children have tea. Between 16.00 and 18.00 on the extended days children are free to continue to work with materials off the shelves as well as with a variety of other free play based equipment.

Children are vertically grouped from 2 to 5 years of age in one room. Each key person and their co-worker plan for a group of children across the age range. New members of staff only plan for a couple of children during their induction period.

Detailed individual plans work well and are available for all staff to access so that any member of staff can work with any child. Planning comes from observations of the child, their needs and interests, which inform next steps.

Comprehensive rotas help ensure that all areas of the nursery and the daily routine are effectively staffed and resourced. This promotes strong team work and respect for each other and the environment.

Montessori Practice: links with parents, including reports and records

Every child's key person is responsible for their planning, record keeping and parent liaison. Parents are aware of whom their child's key person is and are very happy with the information they receive with regard to their child's progress.

Parents have access to their child's 'Great Book' and are encouraged to contribute their own observations and share this book with friends and relatives; they can take the book when they go to see family. Twice a year written reports are sent home outlining prime areas of development and next steps, with space for parents to comment. A final written report is sent to the child's next school.

With the recent introduction of the mandatory two year old progress check, parents are invited to a short meeting with their child's key person; this provides a further opportunity for parents to feed back their feelings on the impact the nursery has on their child's progress and



development.

Biannual questionnaires are sent to parents asking their views. These consist of five questions about the effectiveness of the provision in offering holistic education and asking if there are any ways the nursery can improve. The two-way communication develops effective working relationships with parents and carers, and all feedback is highly valued. The nursery offers several opportunities throughout the year where the whole family is invited to attend. They hold a Christmas show, a summer show and picnic, as well as various fundraising and charity events.

Excellent links are also established with other professionals, such as speech and language specialists. This allows staff to use expert advice to support individual children. Children's learning and welfare needs are consistently met to an extremely high standard.

The nursery's website has recently been updated; it is an excellent resource for parents and includes all the information current and prospective parents need including an events and celebrations section, in a highly attractive and easy to navigate format. Parents and carers are notified of new events posted on the website via a written announcement on the information board by the entrance.

The new parent handbook is also easy to read, informative and an excellent summary of the nursery's provision.

Staffing:

Little Peoples Montessori has two full time managers who established the school in 2003. Both hold Montessori diplomas and one also holds foundation and honours degree qualifications.

Of the seven remaining teaching staff, two hold level 3 diplomas in early years, three have Montessori diplomas, of whom two also have a foundation degree, and two have an honors degree. Two additional, part time members of staff hold relevant professional qualifications to enable them to carry out their roles as the school cook and as the music and movement teacher.

The leadership structure of the nursery is well defined and highly effective. Staff feel supported and confident that their individual needs are met, with emphasis on personal and professional development and aspirations. Continuous professional development (CPD) needs are well documented, ensuring all staff remain up to date with mandatory training. Every member of staff has their own development plan. These, along with job descriptions, are reviewed as part of their annual appraisals. Bi-weekly meetings enable staff and managers to regularly review their practice and provision. After the first visit it was recommended that a programme of CPD or focused staff meetings was developed for non-Montessori qualified staff, to help extend their knowledge and understanding of Montessori philosophy and how it influences practice. Staff have now devised a programme of monthly focused information evenings, where staff research a topic of their choice and report their findings. For the coming year the focus is on Montessori practice and philosophy, with the intention of expanding the topics to the wider interest of early years. Management supervision meetings take place every half term, where staff can discuss the progress and any concerns relating to their key children.

A well established induction process ensures staff members are confident enough to carry out



their roles effectively. Management constantly observes new staff members' practice and gives regular verbal feedback. Emphasis on the nursery's commitment to offer a Montessori education to all children is evident in the job descriptions. In excellent partnership with parents and other Montessori nurseries in the region, all policies and procedures are rigorously and regularly updated and amended.

All staff share the same vision, which has a clear emphasis on the holistic learning of all children and staff. They distinguish themselves through their commitment, diligence and attention to detail. Their ability to assess for themselves what they do well and how they can improve is now enhanced with the introduction of a system of peer on peer observations.

The staff at Little Peoples Montessori constantly strive to improve the learning experiences they offer the children in their care. Through the accreditation process, staff show they are also committed to evaluate and develop their own practice and uphold the Montessori ethos of the setting. The number of families of children who have moved location but continue to belong to the Little Peoples community is testament to the high quality Montessori education the team provides.

Name of Assessor: Denys Lyne

Date of reports: First visit – 12th May 2014

Second visit – 15th August 2014