



**St Andrew's Montessori
Islington**

**Assessment Report
November 2015**

THE COUNCIL OF MONTESSORI EDUCATION (UK)

This accreditation report is the judgement of the ME(UK) Assessor approved by the Council of Montessori Education (UK) on how *St Andrew's Montessori School* meets the key standards laid down by Montessori Education (UK) in line with the philosophy and theory of the Montessori Approach to education originally established by Dr. Maria Montessori. The granting of ME(UK) Accreditation is recognition of authentic Montessori practice.

Name of School:	St Andrew's Montessori
Name of Deputy Principal:	Nicola Byrne
Name of Head Teacher:	Rhonda Wood
Name of Assessor:	Helen Prochazka
Date of Visit:	16 November 2015

Points for Mandatory Action

There are no points for mandatory action

Recommendations for Consideration

The following are recommendations for consideration:

- a barrier to prevent children leaving through the open gate
- sensorial materials not be presented to children still in the unconscious mind phase of development, nor presented to a group
- some individual tables be set up
- ground rule of children only working with materials they have been introduced to be observed more rigorously
- some language materials need to be corrected and /refreshed; some sensorial materials need to be renewed; practical life materials need to be more appealing; lamps might make some areas more attractive; curtains across staff units would de-clutter
- consider accommodating 2-year olds in side rooms

Feedback

The assessor went through each of the accreditation criteria in turn and stated whether they had been met, or not met. There were some recommendations, but no mandatory requirements.

- With regard to safety, the recommendation was made that there needs to be a barrier to prevent the children leaving through the open gate if the staff members' attention is distracted. Ms Byrne said that the picket fence that had been used in the summer would be put in place with immediate effect when the children were outside.
- With regard to the uninterrupted work cycle, the recommendation was made that sensorial materials should not be presented to children still in the unconscious mind phase of development, and these materials should not be presented to a group. It was further recommended that some individual tables be set up to promote concentration.
- With regard to classes being run so as to promote freedom to make spontaneous choices and with regard to active engagement with materials designed from a developmental point of view: it was recommended that the ground rule of children only working with materials which they have been introduced to should be observed more rigorously, to encourage more effective repetition and promote more consistent progress.

- With regard to the materials: there is need to renew some of the basic sensorial materials, and to correct and refresh the language materials. There is a particular need to remove 'x-ray' from any phonic sets, because 'x-ray' starts with 'e', not 'x'. Use box or fox instead and focus on the last letter. It was also suggested that measures to 'lift' the practical life exercises, new waterproof trays, or plastic linings put into the existing ones to make them more appealing, felt insert into trays and baskets for the same purpose, and possibly some lamps to illuminate the darker corners might help to improve the appeal of the materials. It was also suggested that curtains across the staff units in each area would then not detract from the otherwise uncluttered shelves.
- Additionally it was suggested that consideration be given to accommodating the two-year olds in the side rooms, so as to be able to allow the preparation of snack and a group snack time where the adults can model grace and courtesy relating to eating together. This would also enable very basic practical life activities to be set up there, leaving the other practical life shelves free for more advanced practical life exercises. Another advantage would be to have the older children available to take responsibility, in the main classroom, as role models for the younger children and as helpers, for example in setting up lunch.

General Impression of School

The school is a busy Montessori school catering for the age group 2-6, with 27 children aged from 2-3 and 32 children aged from 3+ attending on a daily basis. A group of younger two year olds comes in the afternoon.

The school is housed in a church, which is a shared space, with the school having exclusive use of the end of the nave from Monday to Friday, and the church having use of the building at the weekends. The equipment has to be packed away on Friday at the end of the day, and set up again on Monday morning. There is a store room available, dedicated office space and access to a green public space in what would appear to have been the front garden of the church.

The school population is ethnically and linguistically diverse, as is the staff team. The children all attend every day.

Overall Assessment of School

Children

All the children attend every day; the younger, afternoon children do not attend on Friday afternoons. This makes for positive continuity and enables the children to become confident in relating both to the adults and to the other children.

The children are very independent and all, even the youngest, are confident in the environment and choose their work from the shelves without prompting. Their interactions with the staff are relaxed and very natural, based on feelings of mutual respect. That the children seem to feel responsible for their environment was evidenced by J who was busy wiping the shelves. Another child who spilled the water he was pouring into the tray immediately went to fetch a cloth to deal with the spillage. There was evidence of children showing consideration to each other, as when two girls were negotiating over choosing books and one said 'and shall we swap later?'

There was clear evidence of independent work undertaken with good concentration throughout the morning, for example L, who was tracing letters in the sand tray and subsequently moved on to pouring and painting, all done in a similarly focused way. There were many examples of social interaction and co-operation, for example when L asked O, 'O, shall I show you how to do that?'

A dialogue from a spontaneously formed group illustrates how the children are beginning to be able to accommodate the ideas and wishes of others. The group in question consisted of 2 boys and 2 girls:

Boy 1: This is our working time.

Girl 1: No boys allowed.

Boy 2: Only two boys allowed, me and A.

Accepting this the group continued with what they were doing.

No disruptive behaviour was observed, but there were quite a number of instances of children running through the classroom and walking over mats.

Areas of Learning

The areas of learning are clearly demarcated in the classroom. Each keyworker is teacher to a small group, her 'class', but the children are free to move at will around the indoor environment. Materials are arranged in order on spacious shelves and all are accessible to the children. The two side rooms are equipped to support the older children in their transition to school.

During the course of the visit a number of individual presentations were observed, but not as many as would typically have been expected for the number of children present. The reason for this may be the fact that the ground rule of children not working with material to which they have not been introduced (either by a staff member, or by another child) is not well observed and leads to children exploring material that is beyond their skill level, being unsuccessful with it, and so not being motivated to return to it and repeat it. This was observed in both the practical life area (presentation of the syringe to a child who did not yet have the physical strength or co-ordination to work it) and in sensorial. In particular it was obvious that presentations of sensorial material were being given to groups of children who were not yet ready to engage individually with the materials in such a way that the materials, rather than the adult, will do the teaching. If this ground rule was more rigorously observed there would be much more repetition and so more consistent onward progress.

Some beautiful and well-paced presentations were observed: the binomial cube; matching the magnetic letters to the printed cards; rolling the table mat; locks and keys.

The outdoor environment is not entirely secure. Staff are clearly very vigilant, but the presence of a playgroup in a neighbouring part of the church means that a gate leading to the outside remains open. The other gates are closed, but not locked, and members of the public have right of access because it is a shared public space. Blocking off the direct access to the open gate when the children are in the garden is strongly advised to keep the children secure. The garden is big enough to be quite wild, and despite it not being possible to have raised beds the school has raised potatoes in bags and has plans for extending the gardening into pots next year. There is a good range of outdoor equipment creatively stored in backpacks that the children select to take outside as they go according to what they'd like to play with, and sand and water trays are set up in better weather.

Work Cycle

The issues of security in the outdoor environment, as described above, mean that no more than two of the groups can use the outdoor space at the same time, so this is timetabled, but during the visit the groups came and went with a minimum of disruption to the children who remained indoors. Children help themselves to snack individually when this is available, but there is no designated snack table.

Lunch is served at a set time, with the children sitting at nicely set tables with placemats and flowers. The staff were instrumental in setting this up, helped here and there by some of the children. An appetising lunch is served.

Environment

Being a shared space housed in a church, the ceiling is very high and the lighting from hanging candelabra-type fittings is rather dim. Coathook units and space for shoes are found in each class area which means that the groups going out into the garden or coming back in do so in a low-key way. There is a variety of table shapes and chairs of different heights. Only one table was observed with one chair at it, and it looked as though a second chair had been moved by a child to an adjacent table.

There is toy kitchen furniture in the middle of the room, and coat peg units, which occupy what could be a useful focal area, used, for example for preparation of snack with the children and for a nature table. Although the building is large there seems to be a shortage of space for floor work.

Both planned and spontaneous small groups were observed. The planned group activities were high quality – reading of a story to a very engaged group, the creation of a nest for a hedgehog to hibernate in, discussion of snails, based on a book about snails and surviving the need to relocate the group because of the child who was having the tantrum in the vicinity.

A lovely example of a spontaneous group, totally child-initiated and child-led was observed: 8 children, each with a musical instrument were sitting in a circle, playing their instruments. They sang 'Twinkle, twinkle' and, with the exception of two younger children who came and went, sustained their activity for about five minutes.

Staff

It is evident that there are very good relations between the staff team as a whole, and strong support is provided by Ms Byrne, who, when a staff member was dealing with a tantrum, appeared from the office to give support if needed. In the event the child calmed down and was comforted by the staff member.

Staff members collaborate with each other and exchange information and insights into the children. They know their key children best, but over the course of the year get to know all the other children as well. They are rotated around the curriculum areas and strong evidence of their collaborative working was observed in the very effective scenery they were preparing together for the Christmas production.

In some cases handling of the materials by staff members lacks consistency and needs to be a point of focus so that the children are clear as to how this needs to be done.

The interactions with the 2-year olds were observed particularly, and it was pleasing to note that staff members are able to adjust their responses in line with the stage of development that each child has reached. A good example was the staff member who managed to encourage H to return her glue sticks to the shelf, but who did not insist on absolutely all aspects of the putting back being completed (the lid was left on the table) because this would have been counter-productive as H had already moved on to something else.

Management Effectiveness

The nursery is very well run by Ms Byrne and Ms Pomeroy. Ms Wood fulfils a key role as head teacher and has a comprehensive overview of what is happening with the children's learning on a day to day basis. All necessary systems and procedures that are needed for effective running of the school are in place, regularly updated and immediately accessible.

Partnership with Parents

The calm which prevailed even at drop-off time is evidence of the strong partnership that exists between the staff and the parents. Many nationalities and backgrounds are represented among the children and parents are routinely involved in celebrations and other events at the school. Weekly written reports are given to the parents, and comprehensive observations and records are kept of each child's progress.

Does *St Andrew's Montessori School* meet the Montessori Education (UK) criteria for accreditation?

Criterion	Met	Not Met	Comments
The school is led by a Montessori qualified teacher; there is evidence that non-Montessori qualified staff are undertaking Montessori professional development.	X		
Classes have a mixture of ages.	X		
The working time lasts for an uninterrupted period of at least two and a half hours, preferably three. During this time, the children mostly work individually but come together when they wish to, in small or larger groups.	X		
Children have continual and free access to a full range of the Montessori materials appropriate for their ages and stages of learning.	X		
Classes are run in such a way that they promote the children's freedom to make spontaneous choices; to be independent; to complete cycles of work; to develop a sense of responsibility within the group; to use the materials properly and to work on their own or with others as they like.	X		
Children actively engage with materials that are designed from a developmental point of view and which lead them to successive levels of discovery about their world.	X		
Materials are displayed in an orderly way, well maintained and complete.	X		
Schools undertake written observations of the children which inform their assessment, review and planning of the provision.	X		
Management structures allow for the implementation of Montessori principles and support staff in their professional development.	X		
Children must be safe, secure and safe guarded at all times	X		Will be met with immediate implementation of first recommendation

Statement of Recommendation

The assessor would like to recommend to the Awarding Panel of ME(UK) that St Andrew's Montessori receive accreditation.

Name of Assessor: Helen Prochazka, Mont Dip, Adv Mont Dip

Date: 16 November 2015