



# **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.

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 Andrew's Montessori School**

St Andrew's Church, Thornhill Square, Islington, London N1 1BQ

Date of the first re-accreditation visit: 4 March 2013

Date of the second re-accreditation visit: 25 June 2013

Date of previous MEAB accreditation: January 2010

This accreditation report relates to the provision for children aged two to five years old

#### **Description of the school**

St Andrew's Montessori opened in 1998, it is a privately owned nursery run by Little Acorn Nursery Schools Ltd. The school is situated in a church hall in a residential area in the London Borough of Islington and the premises consist of a hall plus two separate classrooms, along with toilet facilities, an office and kitchen. The nursery has sole use of the premises during the week. The children also have access to an enclosed garden area that is used on a daily basis.

The nursery is open each weekday for 33 weeks of the year for morning, afternoon or full day sessions. Morning sessions are from 8.45 to 12.00 and afternoon sessions are from 13.00 to 15.00 except on Fridays, when the day finishes at 12.00. At present, there are 64 children on the roll, with a maximum of 52 attending at any one time; 47 children were present on the morning of the second visit and 27 in the afternoon, along with 11 members of staff including one student. Children who stay over the lunch period bring a packed lunch. There is provision for children with special educational needs (SEN) and English as an additional language (EAL).

The owner/principal has an International Montessori Diploma and the deputy principal holds this as well as the Advanced Montessori Diploma. The nine other members of staff all hold the International Montessori Diploma and one has Early Years Professional Status.



## Summary

Since the last MEAB accreditation, St Andrew's has continued to re-evaluate its practice and implement the previous recommendations. The setting fully embraces Montessori philosophy and the well qualified staff's thorough knowledge of the principles is evident in the confidence of the children and the respect that they show each other.

Parents appreciate the accessibility and clarity of the settings planning, recording and assessment procedures. Since the first re-accreditation visit, the nursery has introduced a feedback form for parents to record their comments; these are added to the children's records. The excellent key person system ensures that individual needs are met and learning is supported and extended. Parents are very appreciative of the daily feedback they receive as well as the regular written reports. They are encouraged to take a full and active part in school life and form strong bonds with their child's key person. Many of the parents bring younger siblings to the setting.

There are excellent resources indoors, with a good range of materials for all age groups including the under 3s, arranged in the appropriate Montessori areas of learning. Following the first re-accreditation visit, the setting has worked hard to develop outdoor activities that better reflect the indoor provision. There are some limitations due to the outside being a public area.

The children move freely around the classrooms, carefully carrying activities to the tables. The staff are very good role models for the children and encourage a respectful attitude to each other.

The team at St Andrew's have weekly staff meetings and are committed to continued professional development (CPD) in order to benefit the children.

This is a well-run and organized nursery that has a very good reputation in the local community and has at its heart, a commitment to providing the very best Montessori education.

***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 activities outdoors that reflect the indoor provision.

### **Philosophy:**

St Andrew's Montessori School recognises the importance of providing a safe, nurturing environment where children are free to learn at their own pace. This is evident from the very informative website, which clearly explains the Montessori philosophy, and in the way staff sensitively support the children throughout the day. Principles and aims are discussed on a regular basis.

Parents are extremely well informed either through newsletters or the website and are welcomed as an essential part of school life. They are happy to see their children settle easily



into the nursery and have very good relationships with the relevant key person. Planning, recording and assessment procedures are explained to parents during their initial visits to the setting and on the website.

This well qualified and knowledgeable team allow the children to follow their inner needs and provide many opportunities for self-initiated learning. There is a very strong bond between the children and adults.

### **Learning and Development:**

There is an excellent key person system at St Andrew's and each key group plans their own termly topic. Alongside this, every key person plans for individual children and keeps a diary listing the activities they hope to introduce to their key group over the course of a week. This is flexible and subject to change according to the needs of the child. On the second re-accreditation visit, the topics were varied and included The Garden, Curious Creatures, Transport, Castles and Opposites. Seasonal festivals are also celebrated.

Before entering the nursery, parents are asked to complete an 'All about me' booklet that helps the Key Person plan some initial suitable activities for the child. It is the responsibility of the Key Person to maintain and update the children's progress records in a folder, as well as to plan activities that will extend the children's learning. The records reflect the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) framework. Every piece of Montessori material offered has been linked within the records to the EYFS areas of learning; this enables both staff and parents to see the progress made and how the activities support children's learning and development. Staff also carry out statutory assessments for two year olds and contribute towards the Foundation Stage Profile for five year olds.

The children's folders also contain daily observations. These are well written, evaluated and include possible lines of development. Staff can observe any child and these observations are passed to the relevant Key Person. Children's records also include photographs and space for parental comments.

The EYFS framework is delivered using the Montessori areas of learning. Children can move freely inside the large hall and separate classrooms but tend to stay near their Key Person. For safety reasons, free flow to the garden is not possible but staff make sure that all children who want to go outside have the opportunity to do so, in manageable groups, during the course of the day.

During both visits, the majority of activities were child-initiated with some adult-led presentations according to the needs of the individual child. These activities were presented calmly, allowing the children to complete the cycle of activity at their own pace.

Children with special educational needs (SEN) and English as an additional language (EAL) are well supported in the setting and when necessary, staff liaise with outside agencies.

### **Prepared Environment: resources and materials**

The large church hall has high ceilings and is very light and airy. The two classrooms at the side of the hall are also well lit. The entrance has a reception area and space for children to



hang up their coats and change their shoes. This arrangement enables children to do these little tasks for themselves and so contribute to their growing independence.

All the classrooms are arranged according to well defined Montessori areas of learning. The resources in all the classrooms are of a very high standard, with plenty of activities and puzzles for the under 3s, fulfilling a recommendation made at the previous accreditation. There is a designated and very well resourced home corner, book corner, musical instruments and snack table in the main hall, with art and craft areas in all classrooms. The children also have access to laptops located in the two smaller classrooms. All materials are complete, ready for use and, as they are on low shelving, easily accessible to all the children. There is plenty of space for floor work and enough tables and chairs for several children to work in any one area at the same time.

Outside, the church and church hall are surrounded by an enclosed public garden. The school has the use of the garden directly in front of the building, which consists of a small patch of lawn and pathways leading round to other areas. As this is a public space, there are certain limits to the activities that can be carried out. Following recommendations from the first re-accreditation visit, the staff have been a lot more creative in the resources they provide. On the occasion of the second visit, children had the choice of painting large boxes as 'castles' as part of a project, colouring in and cutting out puppet figures, puzzles, books, playing games or sharing the use of 'mini-bug' scooters. The 'castles' and puppet 'knights' and 'princesses' were used later in the afternoon for some creative role play in the garden.

The school environment is prepared with care and consideration by the staff to ensure it can be accessed by all the children, whatever their needs.

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

Children at St Andrew's are encouraged in their growing independence. Most are able to take off their coats and change their shoes and those that are not yet able, are capably supported by staff. The children help to prepare snack, which is available throughout the morning, giving the children free choice as to when they have something to eat and drink. Although there is a designated snack area, having been introduced as a result of the previous MEAB accreditation, children can take their snack back to sit with their friends. The Key Person makes sure that each child has snack.

When children join the nursery, parents are given a copy of a Montessori parenting book 'Learning Together' to help encourage independence at home and the Key Person continues to give parents information as necessary.

The children have freedom to move around and between the classrooms and work with any adult; this was more evident during the second re-accreditation visit. They work individually, in pairs and small groups throughout the day and staff help to re-direct children to different activities when needed. Children have no restrictions as to how often they can repeat an activity.

Children exhibit great respect for each other's work space, moving carefully around the classroom and they have good role models in the staff. When necessary, staff gently remind children of the ground rules. Generally, children are able to complete a cycle of activity and



return work to the shelves.

Even with the limitations of the space and resources outside, the children still have the freedom there to use a variety of activities and choose who they want to play with.

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

Children at St Andrew's arrive at 8.45 and after a brief circle time in Key Groups when the register is taken, enjoy a 2½ to 2¾ hour work cycle. During that time, children either work with their Key Person or other members of staff. The staff have responsibility for maintaining a designated area of the classroom and swap around termly. Although the children are vertically grouped in the setting, children in each Key Group are approximately the same age. As they progress through the school, the children move Key Groups but as they can mix freely, children work happily with any member of staff. The 4 and 5 year old children usually work in the two smaller classrooms with their Key Person but there is a constant free flow of children between the different indoor environments.

At approximately 11.45, when most children will have had the opportunity to go outside, the morning children prepare to go home. The older children tend to stay all day and at this point they get ready for lunch. Good hygiene and eating habits are promoted. After lunch they play games, participate in art activities or listen to a story before the afternoon children come at 13.00 hours. If a child wants to rest, there is a mat and blanket available. The children that come in for the afternoon are all aged between 2 and 2½ years and will move to the morning sessions as space becomes available. Activities continue to be freely available to the children during the afternoon and again, staff ensure that children have the opportunity to go outside in small groups.

The setting offers additional activities on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday mornings, which take place in a side room off the main hall; these are computer, ballet and French groups. There was a computer class on the day of the second re-accreditation visit; children went in small groups with no obvious disruption to the rest of the class. The door to the side room was open all morning, allowing the children the freedom to join in at will.

The setting has well written policies and procedures that support effective classroom management and which are reviewed regularly.

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

There is a rota detailing staff roles and all share the responsibility of helping to maintain a safe and supportive working environment. Daily checks are carried out to ensure that the resources are in good order. The setting employs a cleaner/housekeeper who maintains the cleanliness of the school.

Observations are made throughout the day and each Key Person collates all the information for their Key Group to inform further planning. The records are available for parents to see at any time if they wish and there is now the opportunity for them to add their own comments. Parents also receive a weekly progress card detailing the Montessori activities that were introduced, project work carried out and highlights of the week. There are termly Parent Days and written reports at the end of the Autumn and Summer terms.



Parents spend time at the beginning and end of the day talking to their child's Key Person and are very appreciative of the constant feedback they receive. Parents comment positively on children's increased confidence and their developing social skills as well as the strong relationship that their children enjoy with staff members. Parents have the opportunity on Thursday afternoons and Friday mornings to come into the nursery and spend part of the session working alongside their children.

Parents are also asked to complete a questionnaire after the Spring term Parents Day and there is a suggestion box in the reception area. Copies of *Montessori International*, information about the revised EYFS and the latest Ofsted report are also available for parents to look at.

The setting has made good links with local authority primary schools and welcomes visits from them to help the children with their transition. The next setting receives an informative transition document setting out the progress in the areas of the EYFS framework and the parents receive a copy of their child's records.

The setting has a strong partnership with parents in the nursery.

#### **Staffing:**

The owner/principal of St Andrew's Montessori visits the school regularly. At other times the setting is very ably run by the deputy principal together with the head of nursery. All the members of staff are extremely well-qualified and have International Montessori Diplomas. They are all employed on a full time basis.

There is a thorough induction procedure in place which includes a staff handbook, relevant policies and procedures and an induction check list. There are annual staff appraisals and peer observations which feed into these appraisals. CPD is positively encouraged and there is an ongoing training schedule in place.

Weekly staff meetings are minuted, as recommended at the previous MEAB accreditation, and the setting has an up-to-date self-evaluation document in place.

Staff can make requests for new resources and they regularly evaluate different areas of the curriculum to see how they can be improved. Recently, the decision was made to purchase some new resources for the Home Corner.

The staff at St Andrew's Montessori show a complete commitment to Montessori ideals and principles, they work well together as a team and have a positive influence on the children in the setting.

Name of Assessor: Margot Best

Date of reports: First visit – 4 March 2013

Second visit – 25 June 2012