

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 relevant 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 and considered 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.

Receiving accreditation carries the expectation that settings will continue to work on the issues highlighted in this report and will remain committed to the ongoing development of their practice. Furthermore, that they will report to the MEAB office any relevant changes such as to premises address, ownership, hours of operation or to the age range of children attending.

Paint Pots Montessori School The Boltons

St Mary The Boltons Church, The Boltons, London SW10 9TB

Date of first accreditation visit: 9 March 2017

Date of second accreditation visit: 28 June 2017

This accreditation is valid until December 2021

This accreditation report relates to the provision for children aged 2½ to 5 years.

Description of the nursery:

Paint Pots Montessori School The Boltons is one of three settings owned by the same proprietor. It was established in 2014 and is located in a church hall in a residential area of central London. The nursery’s premises include an entrance hall with doorways to lavatory facilities, a kitchen and to the main room. This classroom has floor to ceiling safety-glass windows along the length of the room, which affords much natural light, and glass doors lead to an outdoor classroom space. There is a wooden floor throughout the room, spacious storage cupboards line one wall and a hatch opens to the kitchen. The nursery has sole use of its facilities during its opening hours only, setting up and clearing its furniture and resources daily. A separate part of the premises is used by Paint Pots Creative Classes, which some of the nursery’s staff assist with when they are not working in the nursery.

The setting is open in term time from 09.15 until 15.45 Monday to Thursday and until 12.30 on Fridays. A maximum of 24 children attend each session and there are 27 enrolled. Most attend every day. On the day of the second accreditation visit 21 children attended the morning session, eleven children stayed for 'lunch bunch' and four children joined them for the afternoon session. Throughout the sessions snack is available for children and they bring a packed lunch if staying for the afternoon. There is provision for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities, and over 70% of the children have English as an additional language (EAL).

The manager and deputy work full-time and are qualified to degree level. They are supported by three staff members who mainly work full-time at the nursery, with some additional hours worked in the Paint Pots Creative Classes. All staff members have a level 4 Montessori qualification and all five were present for the day of the second visit. A peripatetic music teacher also attends weekly. The proprietor attends occasionally.

Summary

Paint Pots Montessori School The Boltons is a welcoming and friendly nursery. Staff members work as a close and supportive team and are familiar with their roles and responsibilities. They offer children a consistent approach and foster a strong sense of community. On Friday afternoons the team meets to share ideas and plan together, both for groups of children and for the individual child. This works very effectively and creates excellent opportunities to enhance teamwork, monitor practice, as well as to promote self-reflection and an openness to change.

Parents speak very highly of the staff and really value how they work to provide positive links with them. There are excellent opportunities for families to learn about the Montessori approach, to visit the nursery or to participate in events. The team works very hard to promote the Montessori ethos and uses a range of communication methods to ensure families feel very well informed.

Following the recommendations made at the first accreditation visit the team has successfully implemented changes to routines, enhancing opportunities for children to be independent. A new area by the doors to the garden has been developed to provide a comfortable place for children to independently take off and put on footwear, with pictures displayed to guide them with this. Furthermore, staff members now take the opportunity across all areas of the setting to encourage children's numeracy skills. This increased awareness of the practical application of mathematics and the additional resources now provided for this area of learning ensure that it is very well promoted.

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 continue to extend opportunities for children to develop skills of independence when accessing the outdoor environment; and
- the management team should consider ways in which additional activities such as music sessions can be included within the work cycle.

Philosophy:

Paint Pots Montessori School The Boltons provides an excellent Montessori environment and pursuing the Montessori approach is clearly at the heart of everything the staff team works towards. The adults take every opportunity to see the children as individuals, to respect them and to provide for their interests by creating an environment that is thoughtfully and carefully prepared and that allows children to choose activities freely. They clearly trust children and encourage them to be kind and considerate to each other and to have a positive approach to learning. They support self-initiated learning and self-discipline through using consistent language, skilled observation and by making time to understand each child. This enables the staff to 'follow the child' and provide opportunities to motivate each one and to extend their learning and independence. The team works very effectively to ensure the mixed age group is fully supported and planned for, with appropriate activities and levels of intervention.

The nursery's commitment to the Montessori approach is clearly defined on the website, in induction information for parents and in the policy documentation. This information is shared across the three nurseries and is reviewed and updated at regular group management team meetings and at the setting's weekly staff meetings. These meetings promote the effective implementation of Montessori principles and the team's continued reflection on its practice to ensure that the environment always caters for children's interests and needs.

Learning and Development:

The nursery provides very good opportunities for learning and development across all areas of the indoor and outdoor environment. Once all children have arrived and settled the small outside area is open and children are able to select from the carefully laid out resources both indoors and out. Outside there is a selection of interesting and diverse activities which have been thoughtfully planned for this small space. Many activities promote physical skills such as painting, digging and watering plants, and good opportunities are provided to learn about the natural world. Indoors, resources are arranged in the Montessori areas of learning and are accessible to all children. These are set up each day and staff members use this time to ensure that the activities genuinely reflect children's interests. In this very culturally diverse nursery there is an excellent range of resources and activities which supports the children in learning about each other's heritage, which they enjoy exploring and demonstrate a good level of knowledge about.

Following a recommendation from the first accreditation visit, the team has focused on encouraging the practical application of mathematical skills both during individual presentations and in group work. They take every opportunity to encourage children to count objects and to use simple addition and subtraction. During the second visit a staff member asked a child to count how many pieces in a puzzle and in a group; the focus was on counting the number of 'sleeps' until the parents' concert. There is more awareness of numbers across the environment. Outside, many resources are now offered to support this area of learning, for example, use of measuring jugs and plastic test tubes in the water tray encourage children to explore mathematical concepts and to recognise numerals. The adults have also provided additional activities in the mathematics area of the classroom. This improved focus and the new resources have further enhanced children's interest and engagement with the Montessori mathematics materials and the team should be commended for this achievement.

The adults work very closely together. Topic planning is compiled termly and reviewed weekly as a team. Planning for groups and for the individual is shared very effectively and each member of staff takes turns to plan and lead groups. They move between the indoor and outdoor environment in response to the children's choice of activity and use consistent and positive language to stimulate interest and generate discussion. Staff members are adept in using a wide range of languages to support children with EAL.

The team works towards an appropriate balance of adult-led and child-initiated activities during the 2½ hour morning work cycles; however, on some mornings the work cycle can be disrupted by a mid-morning music session. It is difficult for this to be differently scheduled but it is recommended that the management team considers ways in which these sessions can be incorporated into a continuous work cycle, rather than interrupt it. On certain days of the week cooking, news and 'show and tell' sessions are arranged and the excellent daily 'rest your mind' groups occur before home times to ensure children's emotional development and self-confidence are well supported.

The adults give careful thought to the routine and preparation of the environment for children who attend the afternoon session only. They work hard to ensure that the needs of those who are finishing lunch and those who are starting their work cycle are met very effectively. They skilfully support new children as they become familiar with the routines, and introduce the older children who stay on from the morning to advanced Montessori materials. The afternoon work cycle is about 2½ hours in length.

Although each child is assigned a key person, this is a small close team in which every staff member observes and assesses any child's progress. They use a secure online Montessori record-keeping system along with the local London borough's required Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) documentation. Observations are linked successfully between both methods of recording so at any one point in time parents and staff are aware of individual progress and areas for development. The key person has overall responsibility for keeping these records up to date, but the staff meetings and daily discussions are used very effectively to ensure that observations and assessment of children's progress are shared. This progress is evaluated and clearly reflected in the planning documentation for individual children. The manager has started to develop

strategies to analyse the effectiveness of the learning and development provision across the curriculum and the progress across groups of children.

Prepared Environment: resources and materials

As the nursery is set up daily the adults take this opportunity to see that the resources are thoughtfully arranged. They ensure that these remain well organised throughout the morning session and in preparation for the afternoon. The indoor environment is carefully planned with the children's age range in mind, set up into separate and spacious areas of learning. There are many natural resources and handmade materials, such as cultural continent bags and laminated shape templates; many of these additional materials have been made in response to the children's needs and interests. These and the addition of flowers, baskets of resources and clean soft furnishings enhance the ambience of the room. There is an excellent range of developmentally appropriate Montessori activities, puzzles and books which are accessible, ordered and clean. The cultural area is particularly engaging, being set up in the middle of the room and offering a bright and diverse range of resources such as a handmade Solar System activity, a live wormery and books about other continents. Furniture is child-sized and in good condition and the children work at a table or on the floor, independently or in small groups. There is a good selection of mats used to place resources on or for sitting, which, during the first accreditation visit, the children very kindly collected and offered to adults.

The adults have developed a well organised area for children to select, prepare, eat and clear away their own snack. They very effectively create space for music, lunch and 'rest your mind' sessions within the room and children help maintain the order of the room through their use of child-sized cleaning brushes and other equipment.

The small outdoor area is carefully planned and set up each day to reflect children's current interests. The staff team is aware of the need to continue to review outdoor activities and how frequently resources are used. There is a small shelf unit containing puzzles, natural resources such as shells and conkers, and resources for drawing. Creative and sensory skills are stimulated. The children grow herbs and use a variety of utensils in a flour tray. They create large paint works on a vinyl sheet attached to railings and thoroughly enjoy wiping away their work at the end of the session. Diverse opportunities are provided for imaginative play. A large sandpit contains many colourful 'beach' objects and the children enjoy digging in soil to discover hidden numerals. There are opportunities for children to engage in collaborative physical play, such as sharing the use of a wheelbarrow and rolling hoops to one another. The nursery also has access three times a week to a larger garden nearby, to which they take small groups of the children to enjoy its excellent opportunities for physical play. The nursery provides a very stimulating environment for children, with a diverse and interesting range of activities indoors and out.

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

The adults at the nursery encourage children to be independent throughout the day. In the entrance hall children self-register on arrival using the online record-keeping system and, once in the classroom, they find their name card and place it in a basket. It is very evident that children are given time and freedom to choose activities and move between the different areas of learning throughout the work cycle, both in the morning and afternoon. This ensures that children are able to follow their interests and that they are able to complete tasks at their own pace and gain confidence from doing so.

Following the first accreditation visit the adults have thought carefully about changing routines to further enhance children's independent skills, especially those for accessing the garden. They have created an area close to the garden doors in which children may sit comfortably to change their shoes. Pictures displayed on the wall nearby act as a guide to the routine and shoe horns are available to assist the children. They are familiar with this new routine and enjoy this opportunity to act independently. Due to the constraints of the building the adults are required to fetch children's coats from the hallway, however, children manage very effectively to put them on and take them off. Staff members should continue to extend their supportive practice by encouraging children to also prepare for home time more independently.

During the work cycles the children show independence by confidently finding work mats, selecting activities and tidying away after themselves. There are very good opportunities throughout the day for children to repeat activities and for individual and shared discovery. Children are also given the freedom to join adult-led groups or to remain with other activities. At the first visit a group of children at the creative table spontaneously selected cut-out paper people on which they drew faces while they happily chatted about their work. Once completed, they placed these in their individual work drawers, demonstrating independence and familiarity with the class routines. Effective procedures are in place to encourage respect for one another, for example, if children wish to join a group activity they may place their name card on the resources with which they are working to indicate to others their intention to return to these later. Before going home children participate peacefully in the 'rest your mind' sessions and demonstrate a good level of knowledge about the purpose of this delightful routine. Staff members use circle times to gently remind children about the nursery's ground rules and about caring for each other.

Excellent opportunities are also offered for children to develop independence and confidence during mealtimes. Children bring in a piece of fruit and are encouraged to put this in the 'sharing bowl'. They demonstrate capable skills in hand washing, preparing fruit, pouring drinks and clearing up after themselves. The snack area also provides the opportunity for children to socialise, as they chat and observe each other. It is available throughout the afternoon session as well. There are resources for children to use for their self-care, such as a mirror and tissues, and those which help them assist with maintaining the order of the learning environment, such as for wiping spillages. The lunchtime routine involves children setting the table, counting cutlery, plates and napkins. Their independence is further fostered as they scrape plates at the end of the

meal, tidy away dishes and wipe the table. Staff members sit at the table with the children. They act as excellent role models by demonstrating respect for the culture of others and by promoting grace and courtesy, including good table manners.

Staff members work very well together to promote the children's independence beyond the setting. Daily discussions with parents, the informative website and literature, and opportunities to attend Paint Pots Early Montessori and Empowered Parenting classes ensure parents feel informed about how independence is fostered at the nursery and how it may be encouraged at home.

Montessori Practice: links with parents, including reports and records

Paint Pots Montessori School The Boltons has excellent links with families and parents speak very highly of the dedicated and informative staff team. Many have selected the nursery for the quality and kindness of the staff. Children may arrive between 09.15 and 09.45, enabling each family to be greeted and given time to talk about their child. Communication at the end of each session is also friendly, open and unrushed, providing ample opportunity for feedback and a very positive experience for families.

The nursery's key person system ensures that a staff member gets to know the child and their family very well. All parents have secure online access to their child's records to which they can add their own observations and from which they can pick up ideas of how to further support their child at home. They are encouraged to contribute to their child's records, including the mandatory two year old progress check. A baseline assessment is also drawn up shortly after each child starts at the setting to inform staff of possible next steps in the child's learning and development. Two parents' evenings are offered each year and these prove to be very popular. At the autumn meeting the team informs parents about the Montessori approach and demonstrates a range of Montessori activities. At the following meeting parents sign up for individual discussions with their child's key person. Parents mention the benefit of these meetings and also comment on how open the nursery is to welcoming parents in to celebrate children's birthdays, to read to a group or to attend the weekly 'show and tell' sessions. The staff team works very closely with families of children with additional needs including those with EAL, to ensure that these children are supported appropriately. In co-operation with parents, specific planning and care routines are agreed and support from outside agencies is sought if required.

The manager uses a range of communication methods to ensure parents are fully informed about events at the nursery, which include Christmas plays, outings, theatre visits and parenting courses. Regular and informative newsletters are distributed to parents and the manager updates news and nursery notices on the online system.

Comprehensive reports are generated when the child leaves. The key person uses the online system to provide an attractive and informative booklet, with photographs and observations of the child, and final developmental summaries that clearly show the child's progress in each area of the EYFS and Montessori curriculum are also prepared. These are forwarded on to the child's next school when appropriate.

Staff: qualifications, deployment, and performance management

The manager and her team take great pride in preparing the learning provision to ensure it offers an excellent range of activities to stimulate children's interests. There are robust recruitment, induction and training procedures in place which are shared across the three Paint Pots Schools. These strongly emphasise the importance of the Montessori approach and consistent application of policies and procedures. Job descriptions are in place. The manager undertakes staff appraisals effectively each year and offers individual supervisions termly. These are used by the manager, along with the setting's self-evaluation documentation which is updated regularly, to monitor changes to practice and establish training needs. Peer to peer observations are comprehensive and carried out regularly. They provide helpful feedback on the staff's Montessori approach and practices. Recent whole group training has included Education In An Ever-changing Future and other Montessori training.

Under the highly organised and strong leadership of the proprietor, the manager confidently leads this small and cohesive staff team. They demonstrate commitment to their roles and responsibilities and are entrusted in their work. They are enthusiastic and very capable Montessori practitioners who aim to offer excellent Montessori provision to children and their families by their dedication to the principle of 'following the child', and they continually strive to further improve the high quality of their service.

Name of Assessor: Carolyn O J McNeill

Date report submitted: First visit – 12th March 2017

Second visit – 29th June 2017