



# **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 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.

### **Leeds Montessori School and Day Nursery**

Wetherby Road, Leeds, LS8 2LE

Date of first re-accreditation visit: 5 March 2015

Date of second re-accreditation visit: 2 June 2015

Date of previous MEAB accreditation: August 2011

This accreditation report relates to the provision for children aged 9 months to 5 years.

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

Leeds Montessori School and Day Nursery occupies a former church building in a residential area to the north of the city of Leeds. The school opened in 1996 and the current owners took it over in 2008. The accommodation is on two floors and is divided into three 'zones' according to age group. On the ground floor there are two zones: Zone 1 is for children aged 9 months to 24 months and comprises two classrooms; 'Willow' for babies and 'Maple' for toddlers. Zone 2 comprises one classroom, 'Chestnut', for children between 2 and 3 years of age and the 'Creative' room, which is used for 'messy' play, group work and for dining. In addition on the ground floor there is an entrance hall with parents' notice-board, a kitchen for the preparation of children's meals, and toilet facilities. Zone 3 is on the first floor of the building and comprises two classrooms, 'Oak' and 'Sycamore', for children between 2½ and 5 years old. Also on this floor there are toilets and an access door which leads across a galvanized bridge to the outdoor play area.

The outdoor provision is divided into areas where children can climb, ride wheeled vehicles, enjoy sand and water play, garden and listen to stories. Covered areas, including a wooden gazebo, mean that this space can be enjoyed in all weathers and



there is also a separate area for the younger children.

The school is open from 7.30 until 18.00 all year round excluding bank holidays and two annual staff training days. Children attending the school are offered breakfast up to 08.30 and then a healthy cooked lunch and tea, freshly prepared by the two nursery chefs, as well as morning and afternoon snacks. Parents may provide a packed lunch for their child if they prefer. Each room has different arrangements for children who wish to sleep during the day; for example the very young children in Willow sleep in low-level wooden 'coracles'. There are 103 children currently on roll. On the day of the second re-accreditation visit 70 children attended the morning session, of whom 13 were under 2 years old, and 60 stayed on to attend the afternoon session, 13 of whom were under 2 years old.

The two owners of the business, one of whom is working towards a Montessori qualification, are involved in the daily running of the school and they employ a full time manager to lead the staff team. A further 21 staff are employed to work with the children, the majority of whom hold appropriate childcare qualifications including three with early years degrees; one holds a Montessori teaching qualification and two are working towards a Montessori qualification. The school has a designated Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCo) to support children with special educational needs or disabilities (SEND) and children with English as an additional language (EAL). There is a 'buddy' staff system in operation to ensure continuity of provision where staff members/key people work part-time or are absent.

## Summary

Leeds Montessori School and Day Nursery is held in high regard by the parents of children attending, and by the children themselves who are joyful, highly confident and inquisitive. The owners of the school are knowledgeable about Montessori philosophy and their strong leadership and commitment in all areas mean the staff team have a clear understanding of what is expected of them. Following recommendations made during the previous MEAB accreditation, the outdoor area has been further developed to ensure that all areas of learning are given equal value. The recently installed bridge means that all children in the nursery can access this well-planned space easily and enjoy it in all weathers. It was also recommended that Learning Journey portfolios should show clear links between observation and assessment: the introduction of a web-based planning and recording system has prompted training for staff in this area. A further recommendation that a programme of focused, planned observations be fully implemented to provide better insight into children's interests and developmental needs has recently been implemented. The owners are striving to increase the number of Montessori qualified staff as recommended in 2011 and have included two Montessori training days each year for all staff, leading to a 'Montessori Training Award' for those completing all levels of the in-house training.



***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 continue the review of the activities and layout of the Maple and Chestnut classrooms to provide challenging learning opportunities for the younger children.
- To offer children the same opportunities for independence at snack time as they are offered at lunchtime.
- To continue to recruit and train Montessori teachers and to aim for consistency of Montessori practice throughout the school.

### **Philosophy:**

The school's vision is "Unlocking every child's potential" and the ways in which they aim to do this are in accordance with Montessori philosophy – such as "providing a safe, nurturing environment" which is "orderly and structured", "embracing the unique learning capacity of each child" and "helping children's exploration, investigation, enquiry and observation to promote a love of learning". This vision is set out in the school's 'Aims' policy and 'Vision' document which are continuously reviewed by the owners and the manager, based on input from children, staff and parents. These are available in the entrance hall and on the school's website for parents to read. Since the first re-accreditation visit further training has been provided to adults working with the younger children in order that Montessori principles may be more consistently applied throughout the school.

### **Learning and Development:**

Children at Leeds Montessori School have many rich learning opportunities both inside and outside. In addition to the staff in each room, there is an outdoor leader who co-ordinates activities outside and communicates well with other staff.

The Oak and Sycamore classrooms are arranged by Montessori areas of learning and children have ample time and freedom to access the materials provided. In the morning there is an uninterrupted work cycle of at least two and a half hours and this is repeated in the afternoon depending on the children's interests. Because of the easy access from these classrooms to the garden, children can easily choose whether they would like to work inside or outside, to work alone or to join adult-led activities. During one observation on the day of the first re-accreditation visit the children in these classes were deeply engaged in either the adult-led activity using number rods to measure the



outside area, in using the outside climbing wall or in working in the classroom with Montessori materials. One of the school's owners is currently undertaking training in outdoor learning and a rota has been established to take children of 3 years and over who attend the school to a nearby woodland park where they enjoy exploring, learning about wildlife and making dens.

Further learning opportunities, including more early Montessori materials, have been provided for children from 24 to 36 months in the Chestnut classroom since the first re-accreditation visit. The layout of the room has also been changed to give children easier access to the new activities. On the day of the second re-accreditation visit the children in this room showed high levels of engagement and confidence as they chose activities and discussed them with the adults. Adjacent to the Chestnut classroom is the Creative Room which is used for group and individual 'messy' play, baking, music and dancing when not in use as a dining room.

The Willow and Maple classrooms (for children from 9 to 24 months) are spacious and bright. On the day of the second re-accreditation visit there were three full-time qualified staff and four part-time qualified staff working with this age group. Children from Willow, Maple and Chestnut classrooms are able to play outside at any time, accompanied by staff. The Willow room (for babies) has areas for sleeping, eating, messy play and floor play. The babies enjoy sensory activities such as touching and feeling fabrics and using musical instruments, encouraged by the adults who praise their achievements. The Maple room (for toddlers) has areas for eating, messy play, physical play and role-play. The children in this room have access to heuristic baskets and small-world activities. Since the first re-accreditation visit further activities incorporating different textures are being introduced to extend the children's sensory experiences and it is also planned to provide more activities to help foster the emerging independence of the children in this room.

When children approach 24 months their parents are invited to contribute to the mandatory two year old assessment. The school has recently changed from a paper-based planning, assessment and recording system to a web-based system which every key person accesses via a hand-held tablet. These tablets are solely for company use at the school and are securely stored there when not in use.

Having assessed children's starting points when they begin at the school or move into a new room, staff in each room plan for children's individual learning for indoors and outdoors; this process is led by the room leader with input from each child's key person. Summaries are prepared by key people for their key children every three months and these are shared with the child's parents. The school's SENCo is also involved in planning for children with SEND or EAL and these children's progress is discussed at monthly meetings.

Planning also covers each group's interests, such as when children in the older age group show excitement about learning to write, or other activities relating to the season. The web-based system uses information from observations made by the key person to suggest the next steps for each child, linking the Montessori areas of learning to the



Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). Photographs are also used as evidence of children's achievements. The digital system provides analysis of levels of development across age groups throughout the nursery which can be used to further inform planning. Each classroom has an 'Interest web' on display so that parents can contribute information about their child's interests and progress and this information is also used in planning.

The quality of learning and development is high for children in the Oak and Sycamore classes. The recent implementation of a programme of longer, focused observations of children (as recommended in the previous MEAB accreditation and on the first re-accreditation visit) now provides the management team with information about ways in which the school's provision for children in Chestnut and Maple classes can be further enhanced.

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

The Oak and Sycamore classrooms are arranged according to the Montessori areas of learning with a very good selection of Montessori materials. The non-Montessori materials in these classrooms are relevant and developmentally appropriate, and children are encouraged to extend their activities from the classroom into the outside area. All learning materials in these classrooms are easily accessed by the children and there is enough space for children to choose to work in groups or alone, either at tables or on the floor. The adults in these areas help the children to keep the rooms in order, encouraging them to put activities away in the correct place and acknowledging when they have done so. They also take account of children's individual interests and skills to suggest new materials to be purchased by the owners, for instance where a child has recently shown an exceptional aptitude for mathematics and more advanced Montessori materials have been purchased.

The Chestnut and Maple classrooms are organised into different learning areas. Since the first re-accreditation visit the purpose, quantity and quality of the non-Montessori materials in both of these rooms has been reviewed, with further plans in place for the Maple Room. It is recommended that the review of the activities and layout of the classrooms continues in order to maintain the provision of challenging learning opportunities for the younger children.

All classrooms in the school have a quiet, comfortable reading area – the Chestnut classroom's reading area is particularly well used. The Willow classroom has a good selection of activities which are appropriate for the developmental stages of the children attending. These are arranged by areas of learning and the very young children are well supported as they choose which area to visit.

The outdoor learning environment at Leeds Montessori School is very well resourced. There is equipment for climbing, balancing, planting and digging, and sand and water



play. There is a tarmac 'road' for children to ride wheeled vehicles on and other materials are provided depending on children's particular interests, such as a trap door to provide easy access for observing bugs.

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

When children arrive they are encouraged to remove their coats, hang them up and put on their indoor shoes. Children wear a pinnie to protect their clothes and they put these on and remove them by themselves at the end of the day. These pinnies are colour-coded so that staff can immediately see how many children there are in each age group at any time. As the children move outdoors to play they put on their outdoor clothes and shoes by themselves if they are able, or asking for help from adults or older children.

Due to the young age of the children in Willow and Maple classrooms, their routines include time for group snack and also regular times for sleeping. The senior staff in Willow classroom are skilled in providing appropriate challenges for the babies and toddlers, which help them to feel successful. In the Oak and Sycamore classrooms the children show high levels of independence and confidence. They choose where they want to work and gather the things they will need to complete their task, asking for help from the adults when needed. They clean up when they have finished, often without being asked, and help to tidy the rooms before going to play or before lunch.

At lunchtime children from the Chestnut room help to set the tables with plates and cutlery – counting and co-operating with each other as they do so. Children in the Maple room confidently pour water from the water cooler and carry their cups back to the table. Children's independence may be further improved at snack time if they are given opportunities to help themselves more and use crockery, to mirror the opportunities that they are given at lunchtime.

Children are taught to respect each other's working space by using table and floor mats, and the adults encourage the children to speak to others in the way in which they would like to be spoken to. Presentations such as how to shake hands and how to greet people give the children confidence to talk to visitors to the school. Children's independence at home is promoted by the staff team – they give daily oral feedback to parents informing them of new skills that their children have mastered, and workshops, newsletters and the recently introduced digital recording system give parents ideas of how to help their children further.



## **Montessori practice: Classroom management**

Children are grouped by age into zones, and also by age within the separate classrooms. Within each classroom adults (key persons) have a group of key children for whom they are responsible, in particular for keeping their Learning Journey records updated and for planning their focused activities. Other staff members are able to contribute to children's records; the 'Interest webs' and white boards, showing which topics each room is covering, give all staff further information about children's interests.

On arrival in the morning children change into their indoor shoes and are then free to choose what they would like to do until just before lunchtime. On the day of the second re-accreditation visit this work cycle lasted three hours, and children in the Oak and Sycamore rooms moved freely between the indoor and outdoor environment during this time. The children in the Willow and Maple classrooms followed their daily routine which also included some time for the children to make their own choices. The children in the Willow, Maple and Chestnut classrooms also had opportunities to go outside throughout the day.

Since the first re-accreditation visit the duration of circle time has been reduced in the Sycamore and Oak classrooms by introducing new activities to small groups of children rather than to the whole class and children are therefore free to choose whether or not they wish to join in. On the day of the second re-accreditation separate activities involving the nutrition pyramid and the geometric solids were presented to small groups of children throughout the morning session. The children were extremely interested and had opportunities to ask questions and to handle the objects. Similarly, children in the Chestnut classroom have more time for independent discovery because activities are now presented to individual children or small groups rather than the whole class. Additional activities such as music and French are offered but these are included as part of the work cycle and children may choose whether or not to join in.

Every classroom has arrangements for children to sleep, and the cosy book areas also provide space to rest. Throughout the afternoon sessions of the visits the children in Oak and Sycamore classrooms had the freedom to work with the Montessori materials inside or outside and to follow their own interests. The children in Chestnut classroom were able to use the activities in their classroom or to use the Creative room.

At lunchtime and teatime the Creative area becomes a dining room for the children from Chestnut classroom, and the other children eat these meals at tables in their classrooms. Snack is available in each room for approximately 40 minutes in the morning and also in the afternoon, and children are free to help themselves within this period. There is a nursery timetable displayed in the entrance hall and throughout the school, and adults are designated various responsibilities regarding upkeep of the school in addition to their key person duties. Daily checks are performed by a designated person and these are reported to the nursery management team. Policies and procedures regarding the day to day running of the school are available in the entrance hall for parents, and in the staff room for access by staff members.



Classroom management at the school is good overall and adults understand the need for children to have freedom and time to make their own choices.

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

Parents speak very highly of their links with Leeds Montessori School and Day Nursery, in particular about how staff members always take time to talk about their child's day when they collect them at the end of the session. They feel confident that they can approach their child's key person with any concerns they may have. Parents are informed about the Montessori approach when they first visit the school – with an initial talk with a Montessori teacher – and then on an on-going basis through newsletters, workshops, coffee mornings and more recently through the digital recording and assessment system.

Social events such as Sports Day and Christmas Concerts also bring parents together as a community. In addition parents receive regular questionnaires about how the school is meeting their child's needs and in particular about how they feel about their child's key person. Regular parents meetings are held to discuss children's development, and the new recording system means that parents now have daily access to their child's records. The web-based system is also used to prepare a summative report when children leave the school, which parents can discuss in detail at a school leavers' evening.

The Leeds Montessori staff team recognises the benefits of strong links with parents and they work hard to keep parents informed, not only about their child's individual progress but also about the future direction of the school.

### **Staffing:**

When new staff join Leeds Montessori they complete a detailed induction process and they are made aware of the school's policies and procedures. Detailed job descriptions and handbooks ensure that each staff member understands their role in the setting. Regular staff meetings give the team time to discuss children's development and the running of the school. Throughout their time with the school they participate in six monthly appraisals and peer-to-peer observations.

The setting demonstrates an extremely strong commitment to continued professional development. There is a detailed development plan for the whole school which is shared with parents and staff. Each staff member has a training file so that management can easily see their current qualifications and keep track of future training requirements. Each staff member is allocated one paid week per year for training. Staff without Montessori qualifications are offered the chance to attain a 'Montessori Award' which is an in-house training course covering key aspects of Montessori philosophy and includes



practical challenges and a written exam.

Since the first re-accreditation visit particular emphasis has been placed on training staff to understand the importance of independence and freedom of choice for children. Staff members with Montessori training act as mentors to those staff working towards the Montessori Award. It is recommended that the school continues to recruit and train Montessori teachers and to aim for consistency of Montessori practice throughout the school.

The setting has recently established a senior management team in order to delegate areas of the nursery management and to support all staff. In addition to the two owners and the manager there are currently 21 staff members working with the children. Eighteen of these hold appropriate childcare qualifications, one holds a Montessori teaching qualification and two are working towards a Montessori qualification. The staff team at Leeds Montessori School and Day Nursery clearly enjoy their work and they are proud of the school and of the children's achievements. They are good role-models for the children and have a strong commitment to improving Montessori practice throughout the setting.

Name of Assessor: Susie Norman

Date report submitted: First visit – 14<sup>th</sup> March 2015  
Second visit – 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2015