

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.

The Little Sweethearts Montessori

2 Upper Gordon Road, Camberley, Surrey GU15 2HN

Date of first accreditation visit: 29th September 2017

Date of second accreditation visit: 23 April 2018

This accreditation is valid until June 2022

This accreditation report relates to the provision for children aged from birth to 4 years old.

Description of the setting:

The Little Sweethearts Montessori has been registered as a childminding setting since 2007. It moved to its current domestic premises in 2016, set in a residential area a short distance from the local train station and town centre. The premises include an entrance which is separate from that of the main house, a lobby area, hallway, three playrooms, a kitchen, storage, cloakroom and sleeping facilities. There is an enclosed garden to the rear of the premises.

Children aged from birth to 11 years attend, although this accreditation report only applies to the provision for children aged from birth to 4 years. The setting is open Monday to Friday all year round and offers flexible hours for children to attend, between 08.00 and 18.00. Most of the children in the age range to which this report relates stay

all day. Home-made meals are provided by the setting.

There are currently 28 children enrolled. The registered childminder, co-childminder and an assistant work with nine children from birth to 4 years of age at any one time. On the day of the second accreditation visit seven children attended full-time in this age group, two being under 2 years old. One child under 2 years old joined for the afternoon at 13.00 and five school-aged children joined later in the afternoon. All three members of staff attended throughout the day.

The registered childminder holds a level 4 qualification in Montessori pedagogy and works full-time on the premises with the full-time co-childminder and two part-time assistants. The setting is able to support children with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), special dietary requirements and children who speak English as an additional language (EAL).

Summary

The Little Sweethearts Montessori offers a welcoming home-based provision for young children and their families. The indoor and outdoor learning environment is allocated in a separate area from the registered childminder's own living space to accommodate the mixed age group of children. The setting offers a wide range of resources and all members of staff place strong emphasis on providing a learning environment wherein children are free to explore and discover at their own pace.

The well-established daily routine enables the children to form friendships with their peers and to develop trusting relationships with the adults. The childminder and her team demonstrate good knowledge and understanding of the Montessori philosophy and they regularly evaluate and reflect on their practice in order to maintain a stimulating learning environment. Following a recommendation from the first accreditation visit, the team has reviewed the daily routine in order to enhance and encourage children's independence during the work cycle and at meal times.

The childminder and co-childminder use a web-based record-keeping system to record their observations and assess each child's progress within the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) and Montessori areas of learning. Following recommendations from the first visit the whole team is further developing its use of this system, linking planning for children's learning to these observations and making records more detailed. This improvement is ongoing and will enable all staff to assess children's learning even more effectively. It is also assisting staff in assessing the prepared environment to ensure that the materials are fully accessible to the children and are relevant to their current ages and stages of development.

The teamwork and partnership with parents are particular strengths of this setting. It also engages with the wider community effectively (through Forest School and toddler sessions for example). Parents express their appreciation of staff members' professionalism. They feel involved because of the daily verbal exchange of information on their child's progress and the information about the setting's ethos

and daily routine, which is available to them through the parent site on the securely-managed web system. Following a recommendation from the first visit the setting now also offers parent consultations, so that staff can discuss the child's progress and plan their next steps together with parents. This produces more consistent support for the child's learning, at home and at the setting.

All members of staff are aware of their roles throughout the daily routine. Following a recommendation from the first visit the childminder has enhanced practice by drawing up written records of job descriptions and staff meetings, to enable more formal monitoring of the quality of teaching and of the support for staff members' continuing professional development.

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:

- make more detailed observations and use a variety of observational methods, recording these observations on the web-based system to further support staff's assessment of children's learning; and
- plan for and evaluate more fully each child's activities using the web-based system, in order to be able to identify more clearly their progress and next steps.

Philosophy:

The Little Sweethearts Montessori provides a nurturing and homely environment. The staff team encourages the mixed-age group of children to select activities independently and gives them the freedom to move easily between the indoor and outdoor areas. The children confidently choose resources and engage in many cycles of activity individually, in pairs or in a group during the daily work cycles that run for at least three hours.

All members of staff understand their role of respecting the children's inner needs and of supporting their development through the provision of a carefully prepared learning environment. During the second accreditation visit the children showed confidence and independence in choosing their activities and tidied up their chosen resources once they had finished exploring them. The adults guided each child very patiently, following their needs and individual interests whilst being mindful of not interrupting them. This enabled the children to continue their exploration and extend their learning productively, both indoors and outside.

The adults are positive role models by being calm and attentive. They respect the children and bend down to their height level and make eye contact while talking with them. This gentle and child-centred approach creates trust between the staff and the children. The setting's ethos and philosophy are documented on its website.

Learning and Development:

The Little Sweethearts Montessori places strong emphasis on creating a stimulating learning environment for its wide age range of children. For example, the babies and toddlers enjoy opportunities for sensory exploration through heuristic and messy play and through their use of early Montessori materials. The 'constructive area' offers a wide range of construction kits and model worlds for all the children to use to create elaborate structures. They have direct access to the garden where they extend their exploration through physical activities such as climbing, riding tricycles and balancing on beams, and where they enjoy sensory play such as with clay, water and sand.

The adults guide the children in all these learning spaces, both indoors and outside, and engage in the children's play. The long work cycle facilitates the children's exploration of activities at their own pace, and the rhythm of the day fully supports the needs of each child as flexible routines for feeding and sleeping enable them to follow their natural patterns. Following the first accreditation visit the team has reviewed each area of learning to provide more resources for nature study, both indoors and outside. For example, at the second visit there was a nature table indoors with resources on the life-cycle of the frog, including tadpoles in a bowl of water that the children could observe.

The childminder and the co-childminder take on the role of key persons for all the children and maintain their records of progress using the web-based system. Staff observations are linked to the EYFS areas of learning on this system, with Montessori activities noted alongside. Planning for each child is drawn up from this information. The adults also store children's work in individual books, which they show to the child's parents. Following the first visit the team has reviewed how it can use the web-based system more effectively. This has enabled staff to identify more clearly the child's progress and possible next steps, and to identify any gaps in the learning and development provision. However, it would enhance practice further if more detailed observations were recorded, using different observational methods, and if the planning and evaluation of children's activities were also more thoroughly recorded on this system.

All members of staff plan topics together, taking into account the children's interests and any upcoming festivals or events. Additional activities such as music and yoga are offered to the children weekly on allocated days and are carried out by specialist teachers who attend just for these activities. The children also visit local woodland on a weekly basis and participate in Forest School activities that are led by the registered childminder.

The co-childminder is allocated the role of SENCo and all staff members discuss any concerns or identified SEND and EAL needs regularly, in order to fully support the children and their families. This support is evident through effective multi-agency work with the local authority and health specialists. The strong teamwork enables all members of staff to reflect constructively on their practice in order to be able to provide well for children's learning and development at The Little Sweethearts Montessori.

Prepared Environment: resources and materials

The indoor provision is set out with four areas that offer the Montessori materials and additional activity areas for art and craft, book reading, construction and role-play. There is also a snack and washing-up area for the children, where they prepare food and carry out cookery activities with the adults. China crockery and glasses are provided. There are separate sleeping facilities and a changing area in the premises.

The carefully selected resources across the setting provide extremely well for the children's learning and exploration. They are laid out at the child's level, mostly on shelves, and in an orderly manner. They are of very good quality. Following a recommendation from the first accreditation visit the team has selected the resources in each area of learning that most closely match the children's current interests, ages and stages of development. They store other resources to bring out as needed. This enables children to more easily access materials that provide best for their needs and creates more space for movement around the setting, especially for those learning to crawl and walk. For example, during the second visit there were more practical life and sensory activities available for the children with which they could extend their understanding and develop their eye-hand co-ordination and concentration. One child who showed an interest in pouring spent a long time exploring different ways of pouring water from one jug to another while mastering the skill of how to pour the liquid without spilling it. The child showed deep concentration during this activity.

Storage facilities are available, both indoors and out. The grassed and partially-paved garden offers learning opportunities for all areas of children's development. These encourage sensory exploration; there are areas for construction play using building blocks and activities that promote large motor skills. All members of staff maintain the environment very well throughout the day, both indoors and outside, and their strong teamwork enables them to create a rich and nurturing setting for the children.

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

The children place their coats and bags on their pegs in the lobby area on arrival. Staff members respect the choices which the children make and support them when help is needed. All members of staff listen carefully to the children, encouraging them to express themselves, and they promote positive interaction and respect for self and others capably. The children learn about each other's cultures and differences, they happily help each other and are keen to share their experiences of family events.

The older children have opportunities to help the younger ones and engage with them in activities, and the younger children develop confidence whilst communicating with their peers. The children also show confidence in communicating their needs to the adults, who encourage the children to make appropriate choices. The children have the freedom to work alone or in groups, and are further guided by the adults to respect each other's chosen activity and space by sharing or waiting for their turn.

The children who are able to, independently prepare fruit and vegetables for their snack, with adult supervision (for instance when cutting food). Following a recommendation from the first visit the team has reviewed the snack and other mealtime routines to further encourage children's independence by involving them, for example, in setting the table for lunch and tidying afterwards. During the second visit the children were seen preparing their snack, independently helping themselves to food and tidying their crockery after eating.

The setting communicates effectively with parents to convey the importance of helping children to do things for and by themselves. During both accreditation visits parents commented that their children have become more confident and independent since starting at the setting, and they expressed their understanding of how they can continue to encourage independence at home.

Montessori Practice: links with parents, including reports and records

Information on the setting's aims and how the Montessori philosophy is incorporated into daily practice is available for parents on the website. Parents can access the provision's written policies, procedures, monthly newsletters and notices of any ongoing changes through the secure parent site on the web-based system. A private social media page is also used by staff and parents as an additional means for communication.

The childminder and co-childminder speak with parents about their child's progress daily and parents access their child's individual record and a 'daily diary' using the secure parent site. Before their child starts attending the setting they fill in an 'All About Me' form to inform staff about their child's routine at home and about any particular needs. This shared dialogue continues throughout the child's time at the setting. For example, during the second accreditation visit one of the children explained that a teddy bear from the setting was being taken on holiday. Another bear is taken home by a child each week to link life at home and at the setting, to help improve social skills and to further encourage dialogue.

Following a recommendation from the first visit the setting now offers consultation meetings to parents to discuss their child's progress and the planning of the child's next steps. These consultations also include the shared preparation of the child's mandatory two year old progress check, which draws on observations carried out by the childminder and co-childminder and which is made available to the child's parents online. A transition report is prepared and shared with the child's future school when the child leaves the setting.

Parents have opportunities to participate in annual celebrations at the setting. During both visits they commented on their active involvement with the setting and on the support given by staff for them to gain more understanding of the Montessori philosophy and of how they can support their children's learning at home through practical activities. Parents also commented on the calm and 'home from home' environment created by all members of staff, and how comforting and flexible the team is in order to help settle their

child in. The childminder has also started offering parent and toddler sessions to families on a Wednesday morning, where parents have opportunities to engage in Montessori activities with their child and familiarise themselves with the Montessori philosophy. The effective partnership with parents is evident, and is a particular strength of The Little Sweethearts Montessori.

Staff: qualifications, deployment, and performance management

The registered childminder holds a Montessori International Diploma and Forest School Leader certificate. The co-childminder and one of the assistants hold a level 3 qualification in early years. The other assistant is currently working towards this qualification.

All members of staff are aware of their responsibilities throughout the daily routines, which helps create a calm atmosphere at the setting. They are also fully aware of procedures and carry out daily checks that are documented, including those relating to the children's dietary needs. The induction program for new staff is conducted by the registered childminder. Detailed written policies and procedures are provided to all staff, these are reviewed annually, along with the operational plan, by the registered childminder and co-childminder. Supervision meetings take place with the registered childminder for new members of staff, giving the opportunity to discuss any concerns or challenges in their practice. Appraisals for all staff are also held with the registered childminder annually.

Following a recommendation from the first accreditation visit, written job descriptions have been provided to all members of staff and minutes of staff meetings have been recorded. This will help the team to monitor the quality of teaching and the support for staff members' continuing professional development. It will also help the team as it further reflects on and evaluates the setting's practice and philosophy to ensure that all members of staff have a shared understanding of, and commitment to, the Montessori ethos and enhancement of the provision.

All members of the team attend training provided by the local authority, and each member of staff is capably supported to use their skills and knowledge when working with the children. The registered childminder is a member of the Montessori Schools Association and of the Professional Association for Childcare and Early Years. Staff members attend regional meetings and training workshops offered by these associations as well as national Montessori conferences. Strong teamwork is a significant strength of The Little Sweethearts Montessori. All members of the team support each other in order to further their knowledge.

Name of Assessor: Andrea Dalling

Date reports submitted: First visit – 4th October 2017
Second visit – 25th April 2018