

# **Children's House 1997 OFSTED Report**

## **THE INSPECTION OF NURSERY EDUCATION**

### **INSPECTION REPORT (OFSTED)**

Name of setting: The Children's House Montessori School

Setting number: 580004

Address: The Band Hall, Kidlington, Oxford, OX5 2DN

Person responsible for management of the setting: Mrs Henrietta Ussher

Position: Proprietor

Name of RgNI: Mrs Elizabeth Mathews

RgNI Registration number 24800

Date of Inspection: 12/11/97

Inspection number: 1014428

**The inspection took place as part of a national programme of inspection of the education provision of four year olds. It was commissioned by the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED), a department of central government.**

# **Children's House 1997 OFSTED Report**

## **NURSERY EDUCATION INSPECTION**

### **REPORT**

#### **ABOUT THE INSPECTION**

The purpose of the inspection is to identify strengths and weaknesses so that providers can improve the quality of educational provision and help children to achieve the Desirable Outcomes for children's learning on entering compulsory education (i.e. by the age of five). Another purpose is to assure parents and the public that nursery education funded by the state is of an acceptable quality. The inspection report must be made available to all parents.

#### **INFORMATION ABOUT THE SETTING**

The Children's House Nursery School is a small privately owned Montessori establishment which opened in 1996. The nursery is managed according to Montessori principles, and children work with the materials at all sessions, although staff also draw on a range of other resources.

Twenty-five children aged from two to five years attend the nursery, and there are eight four-year-olds in receipt of government funding. There are no four-year-olds who do not have English as their first language, although the nursery has supported younger children in the past.

There are also no children with identified special educational needs. Ten sessions per week are offered by the nursery, and some children stay for the whole day.

There are four members of staff, two of whom work full-time with the children. One full-time member of staff is currently undertaking Montessori training.

The nursery school uses a spacious hall in the centre of the large thriving village of Kidlington in Oxfordshire. Staff divide the hall into a number of work and quiet areas, and there is good opportunity for display. There is a securely enclosed outdoor area. Children are sometimes grouped for activities according to age, while at other times they have free access to resources.

# **Children's House 1997 OFSTED Report**

## **1. MAIN FINDINGS OF THE INSPECTION**

### **The strengths and weaknesses of the educational provision.**

The Children's House provides an excellent pre-school education for young children. They experience a range of imaginative and exciting activities, combined with the benefits of the Montessori multisensory approach. Children are likely to achieve the desirable learning outcomes in all six areas by the time they are five years old. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is fostered appropriately, and one of the nursery's priorities is the development of children's respect for each other, and for those of other cultures. The programmes for personal and social development, language and literacy, mathematics and knowledge and understanding of the world are excellent, and involve a range of approaches and practical activities to develop children's learning. Physical and creative development are also well-supported, although the wheeled toys available for physical play are inappropriate for older children. Planning is thorough and covers all six areas, but does not always relate directly to the desirable learning outcomes. Some activities do not have a clear focus, and it is not certain what the children are intended to learn.

The quality of teaching is excellent however. Staff create a calm, supportive environment in which children flourish and show care and consideration for each other, and for resources. Staff question children effectively and encourage them to think and predict. Children are grouped appropriately for structured activities, but also have free access to resources for much of the session. Staff observe children on a daily basis, and assess them regularly. This ensures the children's individual needs are recognised and met, although assessments at present do not relate directly to the desirable learning outcomes. Staff plan to develop this in the future. Children are supported according to their needs and level of development, although the nursery's special educational needs policy only identifies a limited range of potential needs. Monitoring is informal but effective, and resources, apart from wheeled toys, are generally good.

Partnership with parents and carers is a strength of the nursery. Parents feel well-informed about their children's progress and the work of the nursery, and are encouraged to contribute to projects and interest tables. They receive regular reports on their children's progress and are encouraged to contribute towards their assessment.

### **The Children's House is a valuable asset to the community.**

# **Children's House 1997 OFSTED Report**

## **2. KEY ISSUES FOR ACTION**

**In order to improve the quality and standards of the educational provision, the setting should:**

1. Identify a specific focus or aim to all major activities, clearly stating what the children should learn. Evaluation should include any additional learning derived from an activity. This should reinforce progression and facilitate future planning. Both planning and assessment need to relate more directly to the desirable learning outcomes.
2. Broaden the nursery's special educational needs policy to encompass a wider range of needs.
3. Develop the range of ride-on toys to provide larger, more challenging equipment, with pedals for example, for older children.

The provider must draw up an action plan within 40 working days of receipt of this report showing how the key issues detailed above will be addressed. The action plan must be made available to all parents. An evaluation of the action taken will form part of the next inspection.

## **3. SUMMARY OF JUDGEMENTS**

### **A. QUALITY OF EDUCATIONAL PROVISION**

Personal and social development: Promotes the desirable outcomes

Language and literacy: Promotes the desirable outcomes

Mathematics: Promotes the desirable outcomes

Knowledge and understanding of the world: Promotes the desirable outcomes

Physical development: Promotes the desirable outcomes

Creative development: Promotes the desirable outcomes

### **B. CHILDREN'S SPIRITUAL, MORAL, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT IS FOSTERED APPROPRIATELY**

# Children's House 1997 OFSTED Report

## C. OUTCOME AND RECOMMENDATION OF THE INSPECTION

Taken overall, the quality and standards of the educational provision are acceptable in promoting the desirable outcomes for children's learning. The action plan should show how the provider will address the key issues within 12 months of the inspection.

It is recommended that the next inspection occurs within two to four years.

## 4. CONTENT OF THE EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMME

### **The strengths and weaknesses of personal and social development**

Personal and social development is a great strength of the nursery. Staff show respect and consideration to children, and this has a positive effect on behaviour and relationships, which are both excellent. Levels of concentration are high: children work well alone and in groups and have good independence skills. Snack time is well-used to encourage social and language development: children pour their own drinks, give out the biscuits, and have other responsibilities such as watering the plants, which form part of the daily routines. The Montessori approach is very successful in encouraging children to care for their environment and resources. Children have a good deal of freedom to select resources and activities for themselves. All materials are attractively displayed on easily accessible shelves. Children are encouraged to express their feelings in many ways, for example, "good news" and "bad news" time, "happy" and "sad" paintings, and experience of a range of exciting activities enabling them to express joy and wonder. Stories and the celebration of festivals from children's own and other cultures are particularly helpful here, and the multicultural interest table is particularly well-resourced by families. Children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is appropriately fostered.

### **The strengths and weaknesses of language and literacy.**

Speaking, listening and early literacy skills are effectively developed in many ways. There are good opportunities for them to talk about their experiences, especially at 'circle' and snack times, and staff introduce appropriate vocabulary into all activities. Writing materials are always available and many of the Montessori materials are designed to develop pre-writing skills. Children also begin to record in their own

# Children's House 1997 OFSTED Report

books. They recognise and write their names, and enjoy participating in rhyming stories. They handle books with confidence, and sometimes illustrate their own, dictating captions to staff to describe their pictures. There are good opportunities for role-play, and children join in enthusiastically with rhymes and songs.

## **The strengths and weaknesses of mathematics.**

Staff use opportunities to develop mathematical language and skills at every activity, and the Montessori materials promote skills of matching, ordering and sequencing. The current project, 'Myself', has enabled children to explore weight and height. Children have many opportunities to count and compare, and enjoy number games and songs. Practical problem-solving, simple addition and subtraction are skilfully introduced into daily routines: at snack time, for example, during the inspection a member of staff asked "Two children had water instead of milk, so how many children had milk? Eight take away two is ....."? Some children are beginning to record simple sums, and a 'favourite food' activity resulted in the production of a group block graph. One child was particularly absorbed in a number activity, which was appropriately extended by a teacher to reinforce and further develop the child's number recognition. Children recreate mathematical patterns in a variety of ways: they use peg boards, shapes, mosaic tiles and printing materials.

## **The strengths and weaknesses of knowledge and understanding of the world.**

Children frequently talk about their families, their experiences and past activities. Several interest tables are available to encourage children to explore materials and to recognise similarities and differences. The multicultural interest table was well-used to compare the smell of different spices as part of the 'Myself' project. Children often take part in experiments, for example, food tasting, which was particularly sensitively handled, acknowledging children's particular dislikes. Children learn about living things by caring for plants and visiting a farm, and by bringing animals into the nursery. A particularly exciting session during the inspection involved a visit by animals from a local reptile house. Children record their observations pictorially, sometimes dictate to staff, and also take their own photographs. Staff question children effectively, and encourage them to think for themselves. Children have free access to all materials and experience a variety of modelling and construction activities. Good use is made of technology such as cameras, tapes and calculators to support children's learning.

# **Children's House 1997 OFSTED Report**

## **The strengths and weaknesses of physical development.**

Children have many opportunities to develop their physical skills. Music and movement activities are held indoors, and a specialist dance teacher visits once a week. The outdoor area is used for climbing and balancing activities, and wheeled toys help to develop control and the awareness of space. Unfortunately, the toys available are more appropriate for very young children: the staff are aware of the need to develop resources in this area. Children develop co-ordination by throwing and catching balls, and rolling hoops to each other.

Many activities develop finger and hand control, for example, puzzles, threading, the use of dough and gloop, construction, and of course, the Montessori materials developed specifically for this purpose.

## **The strengths and weaknesses of creative development.**

Children explore colour, texture, shape, space and form by using a wide range of materials and techniques. They draw and paint from observation and imagination, make collages, models and print in various ways. The 'senses' mini-project offered many ways in which children could respond to different smells, tastes, sounds and textures, and vocabulary was particularly well-extended. Children are able to choose tools and materials freely. They tell their own stories through role-play and by dictating to staff, and handle musical instruments with confidence and control. A particularly effective activity allowed children to explore and describe the sounds of the different instruments and encouraged them to discriminate between 'loud' and 'soft', 'fast' and 'slow'. The African drum activity was well-used to develop imaginative movement.

## **5. PLANNING OF THE EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMME**

### **The strengths and weaknesses of the overall planning of the educational program.**

Planning is thorough and takes the form of topic and daily planning. Staff also provide a structure by means of which children learn progressively using the Montessori materials. They meet regularly to plan, and topic webs produced identify activities linked to the desirable learning outcomes. However, daily plans do not always identify the specific focus of an activity or recognise the additional benefits

# **Children's House 1997 OFSTED Report**

which might be gained by, for example, a cooking activity focusing on science. Evaluation should identify possible mathematical and language development.

The structure of the session means that particular adult-led activities occur in age groups, while at other times children have free access to activities which receive appropriate staff support.

## **6. QUALITY OF TEACHING AND ASSESSMENT**

### **The strengths and weaknesses of teaching and assessment**

The quality of teaching and assessment is excellent. Staff have a close working relationship and interact well with the children. They create a calm, supportive environment, offer clear, simple explanations, and question children effectively in order to extend their thinking. During the inspection a mathematical activity exploring shapes encouraged children to think about and describe the properties of shapes "How do you think I knew I had a circle in my hand?" Children experience a good balance of teacher-directed and child-initiated activities.

Assessment is thorough and relates both to children's progress with the Montessori materials, and to an additional range of social and learning areas, which, although not grouped as desirable learning outcomes, covers most of the criteria. Staff recognise the need to be more specific about desirable learning outcomes.

Monitoring is informal but effective because staff work so closely together and practice is constantly reviewed. Evaluation of planning and staff's observation books provide evidence of this. Children's records are shared regularly with parents and carers who contribute information about children's activities at home.

### **The strengths and weaknesses of equality of access and opportunity.**

All activities are accessible to both boys and girls and can be adapted appropriately for children with special educational needs. The multisensory environment created by use of the Montessori materials was originally created for children with special educational needs. Staff support children appropriately according to their needs and level of development. The special educational needs policy only defines special educational needs in terms of level of ability, but staff recognise the potential range of need to be broader than this. The nursery has, in the past, supported children whose



# **Children's House 1997 OFSTED Report**

first language is not English, and have between them, a wide experience of other languages and cultures.

## **The strengths and weaknesses of the learning resources and accommodation.**

The spacious hall provides a warm and welcoming environment for the children. with lots of posters. displays and photographs to promote learning and self-esteem. Staff create an attractive learning area, using screens to divide the different activities. Plants and flowers enrich the setting and provide the children with daily responsibilities, as well as opportunities to learn about growing things. There is a safely enclosed outdoor area used for physical play, with some very attractive and interesting 'stepping stones' which the children arrange themselves.

Resources for most activities are excellent, particularly for language and literacy, mathematics, and knowledge and understanding of the world, but wheeled toys are inappropriate for the older children.

## **7. PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS AND CARERS**

### **The strengths and weaknesses of the partnership with parents and carers.**

Partnership with parents and carers is excellent. Parents receive a good deal of information about the nursery when they register their children, and preliminary visits are encouraged. Parents also receive regular newsletters and details of nursery projects, enabling them to contribute resources for interest tables, and to help their children at home. There is regular access to children's records and parents contribute a profile of their child when he or she starts nursery. Information received from parents indicates a high level of satisfaction; parents and carers greatly appreciate the opportunities which the nursery offers to children.

**For further information about the Children's House Montessori Nursery, please do not hesitate to contact us at the above address.**