

Collaborative Montessori Accreditation (CMA) Report

Name of Assessor: Michela Castellarin

Date/s of Assessment Visit: 18th March 2024

Name of Setting: Artisans Kindergarten

Address of Setting: Crabtree Fields Scout HQ, Waldegrave Park, Harpenden, AL5 5SF

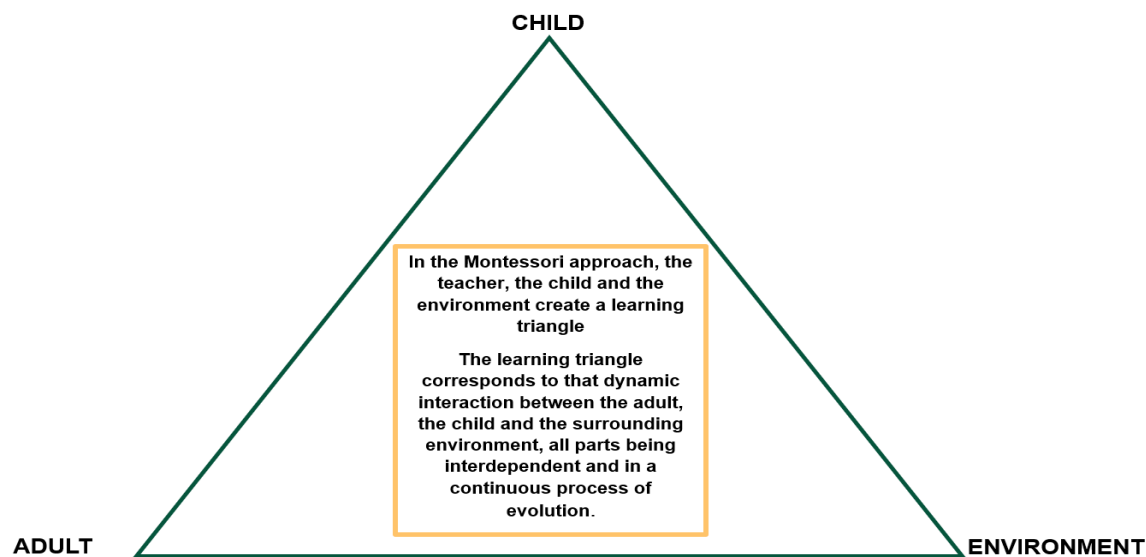
Setting type: Term Time Nursery

Facility type: Shared Premises – Scouts Hall

Ownership of the Setting: Privately Owned

Date Setting opened: 2007

Date and grade of last Ofsted / relevant national inspection: February 2020 / Outstanding



The accreditation criteria draw on the principles of the dynamic learning triangle, which is at the core of the Montessori philosophy and approach.

The adult, the child and the environment create the learning triangle, with dynamic interaction and interdependence between all three parts. In effective practice these dynamics enable continued improvement of quality. This triangle underpins all documentation for reflection and assessment in the CM Quality Assurance Programme.

This report is based on the information submitted by the setting (including its self-evaluation), on the Parents Questionnaire and on the evidence gathered during the Assessor's visit.

The Environment

Summary of evidence and assessment of practice: Artisans Kindergarten (AK) is a welcoming, bright, serene and safe setting. It offers children a caring and stimulating environment where children experience a wonderful first example of school life. There is a sense of peace and love as the children enter the spacious hall, accompanied by their parents/carers; some enter barefoot while some change into their wellington boots after deciding to start their day outdoors. All are welcomed by dedicated teachers who are ready to support in whatever activity the children choose to engage. All areas of both the outdoor and the indoor environments are equally frequented by the children, a testament to the skill and attention to detail teachers place in organising the learning environment. AK is a lovely place for children to grow, move, think and be. A parent said: *"I have never experienced a childcare setting that is so serene and conducive to learning and development. It is a happy place that looks after the adults too!"*

The physical environment

Indoors

AK operates from a Scout Hut situated in the middle of a large natural park; the spacious hall hosts low level shelves mainly distributed around the walls, while tables and chairs in the centre accommodate the busy children. Natural light from skylight windows and background classical music ensure the atmosphere is calm and reassuring. Walls are of neutral colours and the few wall boards display examples of children's artwork or they are used as a supplementary tool to remind children of specific topics covered, such as the recent "Great Questions" theme.

Activities

At AK, activities, resources and materials are prepared and organised with utmost attention to detail; in all areas of the curriculum items are original, beautiful, appealing, interesting, varied, age-appropriate and truly embed the philosophical principles of the Montessori approach. For example: activities are reality based to offer a real representation of the wider world; they are concrete to ensure active learning and are organised in sequential order to better scaffold children's learning and development. Shelves are

uncluttered and host accessible and ready to use activities. Conventional Montessori equipment is well complemented by thoughtful extensions and variations and by original handmade activities; this shows how efficiently teachers at AK evaluate and revisit the curriculum to ensure that the children continue to engage in interesting learning opportunities.

Food for lunch and for morning and afternoon snacks is cooked fresh each day. Holiday clubs are also offered a few weeks a year.

Outdoors

The children have exclusive use of a fenced area that includes tarmac, grass and artificial turf. This area offers an interesting and busy time outdoors: children engross in a wonderful variety of cleverly selected sensorial resources; there is a mud kitchen with natural ingredients 'to cook', a spacious den with the setting's pet (a guinea pig) to feed, a tank with tadpoles to observe, a herb patch and flowering plants to smell, a chalk board to draw on, a car ramp with which to explore gravity and cause-and-effect and a rich selection of resources for playing all sorts of team games.

Children also have access to the adjacent public meadow and woods which they visit regularly for nature walks, offering them another opportunity for connecting with nature.

During the accreditation visit, children were observed enjoying every part of their outdoor environment and they were happy to share information on their favourite activities with the assessor: *"I'm playing tennis"; "This is the Trim Trail: you get in from here...then you go there and there and there."*

The spiritual environment

Order and freedom

Order is a paramount feature at AK: all resources have a specific place within the classroom and all activities a specific place on the shelves: photographs of each activity are in place around the environment, supporting the maintenance of this order.

The organisation of daily routines also reflects the importance given to order, for example, teachers carefully plan circle time and organise children in smaller groups by asking them to wear differently coloured bands. Floor mats are used to delimit workspaces, activities are replaced on shelves and tidiness is restored after messy and/or creative endeavours.

Freedom to choose, to express oneself, to socialise, to move and just 'to be' are a few examples of the freedoms children benefit from at AK; this autonomy is very well balanced by the application of the setting's one rule: 'Take care' which embeds all principles of considerate behaviour.

First-hand experiences and active learning

Children at AK are fully and purposefully engaged, are active and take ownership of their learning. The setting provides plenty of opportunities for first-hand experiences with nature by, for example, encouraging children to care for and visit the guinea pig: an observational bench is placed inside this den for children to become unobtrusive spectators of their pet's behaviour. Children also observe how tadpoles live and change, and they use natural resources to understand the physical world around and the forces that govern it.

The Child

Attendance on the day of the accreditation visit:

Age in years	How many children were present		
	Morning session	Afternoon session	All day
0 – 2			
2 – 3	12	6	
3 – 5	27	19	18
Over 5			

Summary of evidence and assessment of practice: The children at AK are busy with their chosen occupations, are interested in the wide range of activities on offer and are confident within their environments; they are respectful social beings who show care towards others, be it their peers, teachers, or other living creatures they encounter, including their school pet.

Independence

Teachers say: “*Independent self-care is an explicit intention to which we all strive.*” At AK children are given the opportunity to be independent in many ways, especially in making their own choices; they use their functional skills during the morning snack as they serve themselves food using tongs, pour milk and water, peel fruit and spoon jam on their toast; at lunch this independence is somehow reduced. Staff are encouraged to review these important daily routines by, for example, considering the introduction of a rolling snack and by guiding the children to set up, serve themselves and clear away after lunch. This will enhance children’s independence as well as their full participation in the social life of the setting.

Socialisation

At AK, children have plenty of opportunities to develop and use their social skills. Throughout the accreditation visit they displayed respectful behaviour towards each other, the teachers and the environment. Ground rules were reinforced when necessary and minor social disputes were successfully mediated by attentive and sensitive teachers.

Principles of Cosmic Education are embedded in AK’s practice as children engage in gardening and recycling, feed off-cuts to the guinea pig and crusts to the birds, repair and re-use resources by, for example, turning a kite that had ripped into several smaller ones. Training with OMEP - the World Organisation for Early Childhood Education - has been taken to support teachers’ understanding of, and provide suggestions for, the practical application of sustainability principles.

Exploration

Teachers at AK understand that they are the key initiators of children’s learning through discoveries; they say: “... *this aspect relies on the skilled questioning and interactions of teachers*”. Children are allowed to explore possibilities of movement with their whole bodies; they are encouraged to ‘give it a go’ and to always ‘remember to be safe’ as they assess risks for themselves.

Extensions and variations of for sensorial activities are offered to further support critical thinking, enabling the children to explore and experiment independently. The outdoors provides plenty of opportunities for this too; for instance, during the visit, some

children were observed designing, testing and experimenting with a catapult created with pieces of wood and which served as a launch pad to throw dinosaur models up in the air.

Creativity is fostered everywhere at AK as children are free to use and explore their creative energies in all they do.

Movement

Movement is a constant feature of the life of the children at AK; the richness of resources ensures that children's fine and gross motor skills are developed. The free flow between the indoor and the outdoors, the nature walks in the adjacent meadow and the forest school sessions further support the children's need for movement.

Communication

Teachers provide a positive role model for the development of language and communication: they use soft voices, choose appropriate words, have a polite manner, are considerate in their responses and respectful in their demeanour. Children reflect this positive model of communication as they interact with one another with confidence in themselves and with respect for others. Resources in the environment support language development well too; for instance, a large variety of books is offered, with props for storytelling opportunities; realistic animal models are offered and used for role play scenarios; literacy exercises and various other activities provide optimum opportunities for conversation and social interaction.

The Adult

Adults present during the accreditation visit:

Roles and responsibilities	Qualifications	Length of time at the setting	Part time	Full time

Owner and headteacher	OTS, Mont Dip, MSC in Educational Neuroscience, Infant mental health certificate, CERTSEY, qualified counsellor	Since its set up in 2007		All hours!
SLT and SENCO and key person (KP)	Mont Dip, NNEB, CERTSEY and L4 Montessori SEND	Since 2009	x	
SLT, KP	EYP	Since 2010	x	
SLT, KP	QTS, Mont Dip	Since 2008		
KP	QTS	Since 2023		x
KP	Mont Dip	Since 2021		
KP	Mont Dip	Since 2008 (but took a few years off raising her children)	x	
KP	HLTA, starting Mont Dip in 2024	Since 2023	x	
KP	QTS, CERTSEY, starting Mont Dip 2024	Since 2020		x

Summary of evidence and assessment of practice: Most staff have been employed by AK for over a decade: this low turnover ensures consistency of practice for the children, strong personal and professional relationships with families, as well as amongst staff, and is a testament to the supportive leadership style.

Teachers are observant, attentive and always ready to engage; their welcoming, caring and enthusiastic attitude permeates their body language, facial expressions, tone of voice and general demeanour.

A parent said that what they value most about AK is, *“The team, their experience, the way they really care about their roles... Never found a nursery team like them.”*

The Leadership Team

At AK there is a committed, reliable and passionate leadership team, led and guided by an experienced and awe-inspiring owner and headteacher. Together they have created a supportive working environment which encourages self-reflection and ongoing

assessment of practice; the fact that many teachers are long-standing staff members demonstrates how much this nurturing approach is appreciated and how successful it is.

There is a rigorous recruitment process to ensure new staff are aligned to the setting's core values. The induction program for all new staff, regardless of experience or qualifications, is at least 25 weeks and includes training in Montessori ethos and pedagogy. Continuing professional development for all is often organised in-house; the topics selected are relevant, informative, current and are delivered not only for the purpose of training but also with the aim to inspire, motivate and encourage a culture of personal development and inner growth.

Communication with parents regarding the children's activities and progress and the promotion of the Montessori approach are another strength of AK. A wonderful selection of short videos on the Montessori method is available to parents; they succinctly and efficiently convey the essence of the philosophy and of the content of each curriculum area. Moreover, an introduction to both the Montessori Method and its philosophical principles is provided to parents when their child joins the setting.

The Teaching Team

The well-being of the children is the priority of the teachers at AK; children are encouraged to identify, express and deal positively with their emotions, and tools such as visual clues, puzzles, books and appropriate language are provided to support this.

Teachers say, *"Well-being is central to all our preparations and interactions. We have a silence circle every week, we go on nature walks to the woods, we do yoga every week, we say thank you's and practise gratitude at every meal, we go outside in all weathers, we observe change and admire beauty. We create as many moments of awe as we can."*

Teachers take care and strive to support children's holistic development and the unique potential of each child; the sensitive and detailed record-keeping and the thorough system in place that supports children with additional needs are a testament to this care. Reports comprehensively cover the child's achievements as well as their unique predispositions, personal qualities and traits.

All teachers contribute to the smooth running of the day by deploying themselves where needed as they carry out allocated tasks.

The Key Person

'Following the child' is at the heart of everything adults do at AK: for example, teachers support children's occupations appropriately by finding a positive balance between allowing them freedom - to concentrate, explore and problem-solve - and

providing them with guidance which aids their learning and development. When allocating the key person, the staff “*consider the children’s natural connections ...allowing each child’s relationship preferences to be part of the decision.*”

Children’s activities are recorded on notepads and/or iPads (with which photographs are taken and short but informative narratives are written). The key person builds a strong relationship with each child and their family. Parental support includes workshops on neuroscience and parents’ evenings.

SEN support is efficient, regular and consistent. It involves external agencies as necessary, such as in using local authority EHCNA (Education Health and Care Needs and Assessment) that provides extra tools for the assessment of holistic development and academic progress.

Commendations

- The passion, expertise, commitment, insight and dedication of AK’s owner/headteacher in promoting the Montessori approach in her setting and beyond. Her care and concern for everything and everyone at AK. The personal and professional relationships built with both the staff and the children’s families through the years. These commendations are reflected in this parent’s comment: “*All four of my children have and will have a great start to life and their education journey thanks to the time they have spent at Artisans.*”
- The wonderful selection of original, beautiful and age-appropriate activities that stimulate children’s autonomous learning and satisfy their natural curiosity.
- The cleverly organised indoor and outdoor learning environments, that provide children plenty of space to develop, engage their senses, socialise and grow.

- The caring and enthusiastic teaching team who fully embrace the Montessori philosophy in their multifaceted role and who skilfully guide children to develop holistically.

Recommendations

- Review and reconsider the snack and lunchtime routines to enhance children's autonomy, responsibility and contribution to the setting's social life.
- Ensure that activities and project resources of the Knowledge and Understanding of the World curriculum remain present on the shelves to provide children with regularly accessible learning experiences on inclusion and diversity.

Conditions

The Accreditation Assessor has concluded that the setting meets CM main requirements for Accreditation and therefore no conditions are set.

Name of Assessor: Michela Castellarin

Date of Report: 2nd April 2024

The CM Accreditation Report has been reviewed by the CM Accreditation Board. The Board has verified the Assessor's recommendation to accredit the Setting.

Award

Accreditation is therefore granted to:

Artisans Kindergarten

Validity period:

From: April 2024 to: April 2027

Receiving accreditation carries the expectation that the setting will continue to implement the Commendations, develop on the Recommendations and fulfil the Conditions (if applicable) highlighted in this Accreditation Report to continue to strive for best Montessori practice.

The report does not directly address the standards of practice that are the responsibility of the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted).

The report does not provide any assessment of financial aspects of the setting.