

Collaborative Montessori Accreditation (CMA) Report

Name of Assessor: Antonella Cirillo

Date/s of Assessment Visit: 3rd May 2024

Name of Setting: St Thomas More Montessori Pre School

Address of Setting: South Rd, Saffron Walden CB11 3DW

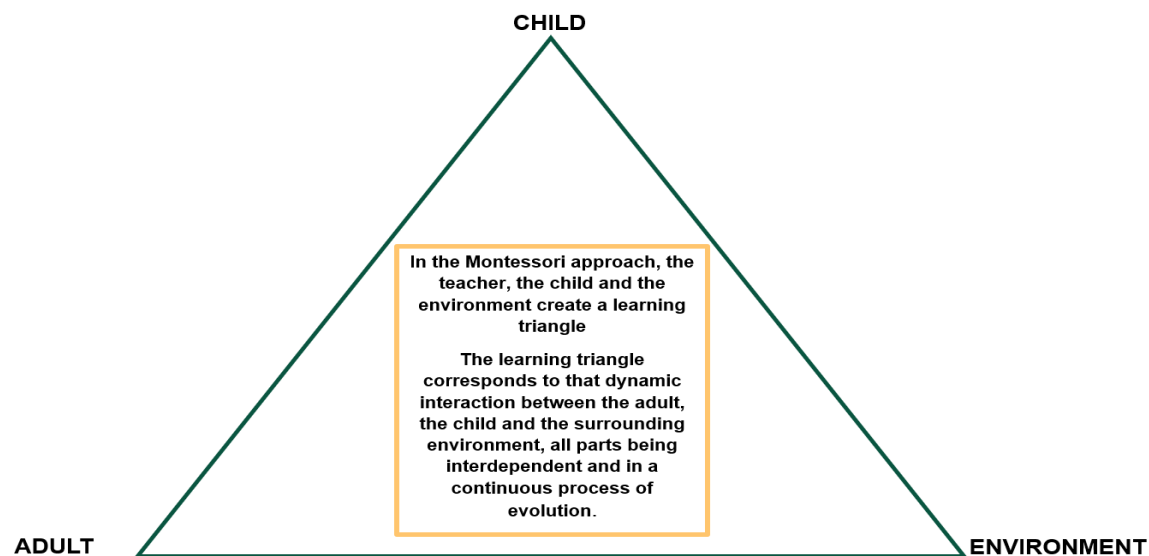
Setting type: Term time

Facility type: Purpose built

Ownership of the Setting: Privately owned

Date Setting opened: 2008

Date and grade of last Ofsted / relevant national inspection: 17/05/2022 Good



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. These dynamics in effective practice 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) and on the evidence gathered during the Assessor's visit.

The Child

Attendance on the day of the accreditation visit:

| Age | How many children were present | | |
|--------|--------------------------------|-------------------|---------|
| | Morning session | Afternoon session | All day |
| 0 – 2 | | | 5 |
| 2 – 3 | | | 4 |
| 3 – 5 | | | 17 |
| Over 5 | | | 0 |

Summary of evidence and assessment of practice: At St Thomas More Montessori Pres-school (STMMPS) children are happy and confident, cherished and valued. They are supported in developing a positive sense of themselves as competent, purposeful and kind human beings as well as in developing functional skills for independence. Children make friends and learn about themselves and others, and about the world. They are consistently encouraged to express themselves, in all areas, always finding strong and warm validation from the adults that they are all unique and interesting individuals. A sense of belonging and of responsibility towards the community of their setting and beyond is also fostered.

Independence

Children show they are familiar with and confident in their surroundings from the moment they arrive at school in the morning. They feel comfortable and at ease in their well-prepared environment. In the Preschool room, older children are autonomous in the many routines and tasks of the day, such as dressing and undressing when they arrive at school or when they choose to go

into the garden (on the rainy day of the accreditation visit children were observed putting on and taking off wellies and waterproof overalls). Children can also use the toilet unaided, help to prepare snacks for themselves and for the group, collaborate in setting the tables for lunch and in tidying up after the meal.

Teachers could assess the scheme of work for 'snack preparation' to refine steps for selecting food and setting up the work area; the teacher's position while assisting children in this routine should also be considered to ensure that a clear view of the room is present at all times.

In the nursery, babies and toddlers move freely, choose where to go and stop to explore and manipulate the resources. At snack time, they help themselves from the serving plate, taking pieces of fruit, pouring water in their cup, and then eat and drink autonomously. Children freely choose their activities: motivated by their natural curiosity and wish to do and understand, they develop and use the many skills involved in all activities, growing in independence and building a sense of agency and responsibility as learners. Children are also involved in assessing risk and discussing what is needed to be safe, emotionally and physically, while experiencing being active, autonomous and purposeful.

Socialisation

Children are ready to develop and contribute to relationships with other children and with adults in the setting. They understand and share the ground rules, based on the principles of respect for self, for others and for the environment. Children demonstrate they are familiar with and understand the routines that promote their own well-being, and that of other children and adults.

Children initiate spontaneous interactions, play and converse, experiment together and role play. Children show good awareness and capacity to regulate their emotions, to recognise others' needs and feelings, and to be empathetic friends.

Thanks to this, children and adults create a warm and calm atmosphere, where all are valued and respected. Adults consistently offer effective role modelling, with the empathetic and positive verbal and non-verbal communication, which children spontaneously imitate and choose to adopt.

Exploration

Children are curious and inquisitive and at STMMPS they find an environment that is rich in provision and in well prepared learning opportunities. Children explore the environment with all their senses, interact with the natural and cultural worlds; in their play, they have time and space to develop their ideas, to form and try out hypothesis, to have fun, to share their thinking, critically and creatively. Adults support children's efforts by providing activities that meet the developing knowledge, skills and

interests of each individual child. During the visit, older children were observed creating 2D and 3D structures with geometric shapes; they explored sizes and weights, textures and temperatures, physical and chemical changes, different scents and flavours, learnt about flowers and herbs, bees and dinosaurs.

Movement

Movement is central to children's life at STMMPS: children are free to move in and to explore the whole environment, as they navigate the indoor classroom and the outdoor prepared areas, in free flow. Through freedom of movement, children grow in competence and confidence as they repeat and extend their play, challenging their knowledge and their abilities. Large and/or fine motor skills are developed with every choice of activity: open ended resources, tools and loose-parts collections, tricycles and instruments are used to build, run, jump, climb, sing and perform drama. Children are free to move between all areas of curriculum, approaching the shelves and taking the material they wish to engage with. Older children enjoy complete free flow movement between indoor and outdoor areas while younger children access the garden in small groups. On the day of the visit, children splashed in the puddles, built and threw small bricks, explored water and dinosaurs in gloop; indoors they explored shapes and sizes, walked, climbed up and jumped off small steps, held cutlery and food, used jugs and tongs, rocked and danced to nursery rhymes.

Communication

At STMMPS children are keen communicators: they are invited to actively participate in conversations, knowing that they are listened and responded to with attention, respect and interest. Children communicate freely with adults and with other children, their language is rich and well-articulated. Adults use language that is rich in vocabulary and well structured, to support children's opportunities for learning from each other, for thinking together and for ideas to grow. In the nursery room, a child using one-word sentences was supported in their language development by the adult in a beautiful exchange: "*Rain...Wet*", "*Yes, much rain, all is wet, there's a puddle*", "*Puddle...Boots!*", "*Yes, you need boots to splash in the puddle*", "*Splash...Boots*", "*Would you like to go out into the garden?*" and together got dressed for the rain, went out and splashed in the puddle.

Children develop communication skills to collaborate and resolve problems, to be assertive and kind, to be empathetic and to care for others and the world. In the preschool room two children approached the teachers and explained: "*We have everything to do our work, and now we choose a window to clean.*" Two children were role playing family life, looking after their two babies

and discussing what they needed to make the bed, what food was appropriate; one child explained while holding the baby: “*We need to put the baby down, very gently, so he burps*”. During the day, children who gradually became more comfortable with the presence of a new person, came to introduce themselves and asked for the name of the visitor. A child showed his recently made superhero paper cape and asked for assistance to attach the two wool strings. Adults promote open dialogue and collaboration with parents and make sure as much as possible that at the beginning and end of every day there is contact with parents when information is shared; children are present and are part of this dialogue, absorbing positive models of verbal and non-verbal communication, turn taking in speaking and listening.

The Environment

Summary of evidence and assessment of practice: With the richness of educational resources and the calm and light atmosphere, the environment at STMMPS is welcoming and inviting for all. The two main classrooms face each other, as they open to the central garden, to the outdoor classroom and playground. Children are free to move between outdoors and indoors, to discover and create, to question and learn. Younger and older children can experience a strong sense of freedom while being safe, a strong sense of being connected with their well-knitted community of children and families, but also to the whole community of the St Thomas More primary school. The activities and the materials provide continuous and accessible opportunities for being involved, playing and observing.

Order

Order is present everywhere at STMMPS. Children have developed a fundamental familiarity with their school, based on the predictable environment. The routines within the three hours work cycle are clear and simple, known and shared by children and adults. Throughout the day, children feel competent in what they do, complete the full cycle of activity, are self-assured when they settle in the new day, confident when making new choices and decisions. The indoor and outdoor spaces are well defined and logically organised with the resources being well prepared and accessible. Children can orientate and move in their environments with confidence and purpose, developing holistically and in harmony with their surroundings.

The activities

The activities are well organised on shelves in clearly identified areas of the curriculum. The materials are in good condition and are displayed either on shelves or in containers, are well-spaced and always accessible to children. Montessori materials and teacher-made activities are side by side on shelves, carefully selected to complement and extend interest and learning experiences for children. The activities that are designed and made by teachers show skill and knowledge of the Montessori educational principles, which have been applied to scaffold children's learning. The variety of activities support children in finding, repeating and consolidating earlier work, while being curious to explore different possibilities or to 'have a go' at something new.

The physical environment

Indoors

STMMPS stands within the grounds of St Thomas More Primary School. It consists of two independent purpose-built structures, facing each other and opening to the shared garden, which borders the school's main playground. Children and their families enter from the garden entrance door, into the small hallway area which is furnished with pegs for coats, overalls, indoor shoes and wellies. This hallway opens up to the airy and spacious classroom, with big windows for natural light. Well displayed activities, a few small tables, ample floor space for moving around and for working create an interesting environment that calls for full engagement, active learning and enjoyment. A well recognisable area is dedicated to book reading, storytelling, puppet theatre and relaxation. A large space at the other end of the room houses the kitchen area; this is used for preparing snacks, brewing herbal tea and for regular cooking activities in the afternoon; here children set up tables and plate food creating a functioning and charming little 'lunchroom'. This area is also used for painting, cutting and glueing and modelling; on the day of the visit a large exploratory tray was set up with bright colour gloop, and bees and other bugs that were "...*hiding in there!*"

The nursery room, which hosts toddlers from 12 months to two years, is a spacious and light room. The entrance cloakroom for changing shoes and getting dressed for outdoors opens into the main space, which is well structured to provide space for movement and exploration, as well as for sitting comfortably for snack and lunch, and for other manipulative activities. Low open cabinets create spaces for walking and exploring sensorial and motor activities; the cabinets function also as support for cruising, sitting down and standing up. A wooden walkway provides a variety of experiences for children's holistic

development. A separate and enclosed space, houses coats and changing facilities, providing a calm, cosy and restful atmosphere.

Outdoors.

The two groups of children share the central garden, which presents two spaces closer to each classroom, offering Montessori activities accessible either on shelves or on free standing trays; for example, a beautiful large spindle box and a pink tower were on offer during the accreditation visit as well as tyres for rolling or lifting, trays with water, and other natural materials. Constructions with wooden planks and stepping stones meet the developmental motor needs of the two groups. In the shared open space children, being part of a larger vertical group, can spontaneously observe one another, learn and imitate, join in and extend their play. The outdoors includes an enticing mud kitchen “...for mixing stirring and chopping and a bark area, sandpit and stony area that provide a variety of different sensory experiences...” and a table and chairs and raised flower beds to grow fresh herbs. A large part of the garden, covered with Playturf, invites children to run and ride tricycles while a sloping area and a hill with a climbing rope ladder and a wooden tunnel promote risk taking and creative thinking during play. A small wooden tent and a garden house are flexible provisions for free flow play, storytelling and reading, and provide a change of atmosphere.

Firsthand experiences and active learning

At STMMPS, all activities are designed for active involvement. Materials require children to use their senses, to handle items and to move; in all areas of the curriculum, children are invited to actively engage, to think, to find out, to understand and to operate with knowledge, to make hypotheses and to create new understanding. During the visit, Activities of Everyday Living and Sensorial activities were repeated with variations and were extended into role play: children prepared fruit for snack, cleaned windows, pretended to ‘be on holiday’ wearing sunglasses, carrying bags and a camera, as they walked around the room, stopping now and then to ‘take a photo during sightseeing’. Children discovered and categorised colours, textures, built with geometric shapes, created a whole town with small blocks and small world features, prepared tea and cooked cheese scones. Children experimented with water, soil, textures, temperature, discussed animals’ habitats, looked at the life cycle of the bee and played with musical instruments. For ‘Library Book Exchange Day’ at the primary school, a small group of children exchanged and purchased books for charity.

The Adult

Adults present during the accreditation visit.

| Role and responsibilities | Qualifications | Length of time at the setting | Part time* | Full time* |
|---------------------------------|--|-------------------------------|------------|------------|
| RS Manager | BED hons English and Drama Integrating Montessori Practice MCI | 5 years | 4 days | |
| AL Room Leader, Nursery Room | Ba Ed Hons Geography, Level 3 cache Montessori Practice | 3 years | | 5 days |
| AN Practitioner | Level 2, Montessori Practice | 2 years | 4 days | |
| AR | 6+ GCSE in Maths and English | 3 years | 4 days | |
| VM Deputy Manager | Montessori Level 3 and finishing BS (Hons) in Early Childhood Studies and Montessori Pedagogy | 6 years | 4 days | |
| CC Practitioner | Level 3 Montessori Practice | 3 years | 3 days | |
| EW Practitioner | Studying towards Montessori in Practice QTS Early Years PGCE BA(Hons) in Early Childhood Studies | 3 years | 4 days | |

| | | | | |
|-----|--|--------------------|--------|--|
| | | | | |
| LBJ | BA(Hons) in Education & Social Science, PGCE | 1.5 years | 2 days | |
| LP | Higher National Dip Musical theatre Level 5 sports massage 200hr Yoga teacher training Barre instructor | Since October 2023 | 3 days | |

Summary of evidence and assessment of practice: Teachers at STMMPS share Montessori values of respecting and following the inner spontaneous activity of the developing child, who is naturally interested in the world around and in the people within it. They offer children consistent resources that meet their interests and needs. Teachers are ready to engage with children, being positive role models as they themselves are curious, inquisitive, and ready to learn. Teachers prepare a welcoming environment that invites children to interact and discover. They create continued opportunities for children to grow in autonomy and confidence. Teachers model and facilitate children in developing meaningful relations with other children and with adults, to become aware of and understand others' ideas and feelings as well as their own. Children become empathic and eager to help, feel they belong to the community and can be helpful and contribute to it. Teachers recognise the centrality of parents and families in the children's lives and therefore promote a trusting collaboration between school and family; together they aim to create a strong sense of belonging for all, a sense of responsibility and capacity to contribute, following the principles of Montessori Cosmic Education.

The Leadership Team

The LT is formed by the principal, the school manager, the deputy manager and the nursery room leader. The owner and principal of the school is the driving force behind STMMPS, and is an inspiring, experienced and passionate professional who is also the founder of a Montessori consultancy and training centre.

Attention is given to supervision and assessment of practice and to supporting and mentoring new teachers. The manager and deputy/room leader supervise the teaching team and give regular feedback. Regularly held team meetings are dedicated to

planning, to discussing each child's development and well-being. The LT promotes continuing professional development and organises workshops to support new teachers to understand the Montessori pedagogy, the principles and the strategies that underpin their daily practice. The importance of strong positive partnership with parents is recognised and communication between school and families is regular with newsletters, parents-teachers' meetings, updates of observations through the online platform, sharing of each child's Montessori Book and with open days. Parents are gradually involved in theme/projects, outings and charity events.

The LT could review a calendar of parent one-hour visits (in small groups) that could provide a more detailed window on their child's experience in the school environment.

The LT shares Montessori values and the principles of Cosmic Education, by, for example, promoting the sustainable use of natural resources and the importance of collective awareness and responsibility in protecting the world.

The Teaching Team

At STMMPS, teachers hold qualifications in Early Years Education and are specialised in Montessori Education. The Teaching Team is well established, is *'close-knit and all try hard to support each other and communicate effectively and 'in the moment'*. All teachers are motivated to learn from each other and work closely together; more experienced teachers mentor and guide their colleagues in training for an Early Years and/or Montessori qualification. Teachers observe and know each child, celebrate their individual qualities, and support and nurture their development and learning. They are skilful in 'planning in the moment', they 'follow the child', they observe and take note of how children play and express their ideas, identifying moments when children need support, or when they can independently apply their knowledge or use new abilities or try out new ideas.

Teachers present activities individually and in small groups, allowing children to choose to join in freely and welcoming their full participation. Teachers share their knowledge of each child with colleagues and parents; during the visit, it was evident that every child is well known and that every experience and activity is adapted to the unique child, their interests and abilities, their knowledge and needs. Teachers work in collaboration with the SEN coordinator, with the family and with external therapists to meet and support the child's abilities and needs and to coordinate individual programmes.

Teachers are committed to continuing professional development and to excellence in their work with children and their families.

The Key Person

At STMMPS, all children have a dedicated, approachable and affectionate key person, who forms the positive relationship that underpins the children’s holistic development. The key person designs and prepares the environment that every child will explore, with materials that they will use and discover. The key Person forms good partnership with the children’s families: records of the child’s activities and progress are shared with parents on the online system through regular observations, assessments and planning. Individual meetings between parents and the key person are scheduled regularly during the year but they also happen spontaneously and are called ad hoc, by parents or the school, whenever it is felt needed. Parents are very appreciative of teachers and say they *“are experienced and care for our children. They are all very approachable and we trust them with our children’s care.”*

Commendations

- The school’s commitment to providing children with positive relations and experiences, to develop as *“confident, well-mannered, independent children, who have respect for the people and the world around them”*.
- The close team of teachers, each aspiring to professional competency, motivated to continue their personal development and ready to collaborate. The strong partnership between school and families are recognised as key conditions to work together to promote and celebrate every child’s well-being, their sense of belonging and being valued, their holistic development and learning.
- The learning environment is rich and provides a wealth of opportunities for children to thrive, to express who they are, what they are interested in and how they understand their world and wish to learn, how they build positive relations, play and care for each other.

Recommendations

- Examine the daily routine of preparing the snack and analyse the elements and steps that could facilitate children's involvement and their contribution to this aspect of community life.
- The LT could review a calendar of more frequent and more manageable parent visits in smaller groups that could provide a window to observe their child's experience in the school environment.
- Continue to develop the existing programme of workshops focused on Montessori ethos and pedagogy by organising additional workshops and an in-house mentoring system to support new teachers who have not yet had Montessori training. Review the mentoring and supervision plan by creating a more manageable system for regular peer-on-peer observations, focused discussion of 'wow teaching moments', Q&A sessions and supervised practice with Montessori material.
- Continue to develop your setting's practice on sustainability, involving children and their families, and continue to strengthen your collaboration with St Thomas More Primary School and the larger community, *"...to grow awareness and take responsibility, all together, within the world and of the impact our actions have on the planet and the future of our world."*

Conditions

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

Name of Assessor: Antonella Cirillo

Date of Report: 25/5/2024

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:

St Thomas More Montessori Pre-School

Validity period:

From: June 2024 to: June 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.