

# **Montessori Evaluation and Accreditation Board**

## **School Accreditation**

This report is prepared following an accreditation visit made on behalf of the Montessori Evaluation and Accreditation Board. It considers how far the school follows the criteria out in "The Guide to the EYFS in Montessori Settings".

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.

### **Anne Frank Montessori, Horsham**

The Scout Hut, Higgins Way, Bennett's Field, off Brighton Rd, Horsham, West Sussex  
Visited on 24 June 2009

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

Horsham Montessori Nursery School is a privately owned suburban school which opened in 1996 and moved to its current premises in 2006. It is one of two nurseries owned by this Montessori led company. It is situated close to the Brighton Road in Horsham, easily accessible by car and public transport. It comprises one large classroom situated in a single storey building, with storage, children's toilets and a small pantry kitchen. A disabled toilet is located off the entrance hall.

An additional large room provides for indoor sports, clubs and special events together with a fully equipped kitchen. Children have access to a secure enclosed outdoor play area with wheeled toys, water tray, growing plants and a quiet garden comprising lawn, patio, and access to a secure pond. The adjacent field is accessible for field trips, sports and special events.

The nursery is open from 8.30 to 1.00 on Mondays and Fridays and 08.30 to 2.00 on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays for 38 weeks of the year. Provision for extended hours and a holiday club are available in partnership with the nearby Casa dei Bambini registered childminders group. The school is registered for 26 children up to the age of five years and has 41 currently on roll. Children attend from the local and surrounding area. The school supports children with learning difficulties and children who speak English as an additional language. The school employs eight staff. Of these, six of the staff hold appropriate early years qualifications (one of whom is Montessori qualified) and two staff are working towards a qualification.

#### **Summary and conclusion.**

The commitment and enthusiasm of staff is exceptional and produces very good team work. The children are confident, independent and concentrate very well on their chosen activities. Their good behaviour is self regulated and they learn at their own pace. The quality of verbal interaction between the children is very high. The natural environment of a garden, pond, park and allotments provide children with exceptionally good regular opportunities for exploration and understanding of life cycles. Montessori practices are discernable throughout

the nursery. Classroom procedures are not displayed for parents and staff. Written reports to parents could be more informative and newsletters more regularly produced.

*The school provides an education which broadly follows the principles of the Montessori approach and environment. This merits accreditation by the Montessori Evaluation and Accreditation Board, but consideration should be given to the following points for further development:*

- Display classroom procedures for parents and staff as a reminder that work cycle is not interrupted while the children have their needs met.
- Provide more detail in written reports for parents to enable them to see the progression of their child in all areas of learning and in particular aspects of Montessori literacy.

### **Philosophy**

This setting is proactive in promoting the Montessori philosophy and implementing it effectively in the classroom. The principles are known by staff and communicated to parents in a range of formats. Staff work closely with the parents who feel that the needs of the family are met through responsiveness to comments. The recently updated vision statement indicates respect for the parents' leading role as their child's first educators and together they aim to develop the child's innate confidence and desire to learn.

A welcome pack for parents includes a copy of a booklet called 'Reach' about the introduction of the Montessori movement into the UK. Reviews of the principles, goals and philosophy discussed at monthly team meetings and termly company meetings and are recorded. New parents are given guided tours of the classroom and a period of settling in sessions which are extended or shortened depending on progress made.

This "follow the child" philosophy and practice support the children in fulfilling their unique potential. Freedom for the children is maximized by minimising hazards. Free flow access is provided for the duration of the three hour work cycle to the outdoors or the indoor big room and is positively reflected in the behaviour and attitudes of the children towards each other and the prepared environment. Children are absorbing knowledge and concepts at their own pace. The 'inner need' of the child is consistently followed encouraging independence and good levels of self-esteem and high quality interactions between children. Staff are supporting children in all areas of their learning and development through observation, guidance and reassurance.

Children's learning and progress is assessed and recorded through constant observation. The Montessori curriculum and the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) have recently been integrated into a new record keeping system monitoring the child's learning journey to enable parents to discuss their child's progress formally with their key person once per term. This broad curriculum is particularly strong on providing regular experience of the natural environment. The purposeful activity, calm atmosphere and the caring social interactions of the children distinguish this school as being a good Montessori setting.

### **Learning and Development**

A wide range of activities are provided which are developmentally appropriate and meet the learning needs of the children. The EYFS is integrated with the Montessori curriculum. Children have good access to the resources on the shelves in all six areas of learning and choose their own activities and repeat them as often as they wish. The children's concentration is very good.

Planning is done weekly for all ages together in one large classroom. Individual planning is done by the key persons and there are general themes for a term or half term, sometimes leading up to an event, for instance an end-of-term party. The week plan is on display in the entrance hall and tends to focus on circle time activities. Long term planning is for the year and is developed across all company settings. Medium term is incorporated in the monthly planning. Short term planning is weekly and is contributed to by all staff. Daily planning takes account of any special circumstances such as the weather features or the presence of tree surgeons in the park. This is a particularly good aspect of the planning, as staff are sufficiently flexible to respond to the great natural opportunities which are presented to them to further enhance the learning of the children. Children do not just watch the tree surgeons at work, they get to feel and create pictures with the wood chippings and learn about the life cycle of trees and recycling. This learning about nature is naturally extended to observing fruit, vegetables and flowers growing in the allotments just alongside their garden. This includes visits to the allotments and gifts of seedlings for the children to plant in their own garden and daily nurturing of the growing plants.

A new recording system of the child's learning journey has recently been introduced, and is regularly updated to feed into the progress monitoring and individual planning system and has an explanatory introduction to remind practitioners how they are meant to be used. Observations and photographs are also kept in this file. Staff are transferring information from the earlier recording and assessment systems to the new one. At lunchtime staff eat with the children to model good manners and offer gentle and effective encouragement. The needs of children with additional needs or difficulties are well catered for through careful observation. Additional support is accessed with parent's permission to involve the local professional visiting team who provide a report with suggestions to meet the specific needs.

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

The full range of Montessori resources for this age group is set out in order around the classroom and is carefully maintained. All the indoor and outdoor resources are easily accessible to the children and despite having to be stored away daily, the staff provide a warm and welcoming environment, with displays of children's work in the entrance hall and on the walls.

Effective use is made of the accommodation by catering for gross motor skills in the tarmac area outdoors as well as the softer surfaced play area, the grass lawn garden and the large indoor sports hall. Children have excellent opportunities provided for inquisitiveness, investigation and observation outdoors due to the proximity of the allotments and the pond. The children do not have to leave their securely fenced area to participate in this exploration and the staff perform safety checks in the garden daily. Sufficient space is available on the grass for children to use the parachute, to run and when further space is required they have the park just outside their gate. Children enjoy using the facility so much that parents have

requested staff not use the slide in the park, as they have to encourage children to depart from the nursery at the end of the sessions by offering them time on the climbing frame.

The outside areas offer free-flow access and have functional equipment for the development of motor skills and good opportunities for independent learning. There is a vegetable garden, tricycles, sand and water areas and furniture for role play.

Resources for sports are very good, and a range of percussion instruments are available to the children. Staff are continually extending and complementing Montessori materials with other resources to extend children's learning. All resources are appropriate to the age range in the nursery.

Montessori materials are complete, clean, systematically arranged and ready for use. The layout ensures that children have ample space in adjacent areas to use them. Natural lighting is provided by windows on either side of the room. A smaller storage room contains more advanced materials. Good quality books are accessible to children in the book corner and staff design and make very attractive resources for storytelling. Mats are readily available for floor work and dressing up clothes for imaginative play. An application for government funding for the refurbishment of the nursery is being processed to replace equipment both indoors and outdoors.

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

Access, choice and unlimited time to complete an activity facilitate the children's independence in this nursery. Children have free flow of movement both indoors and outdoors throughout the three hour work-cycle.

Parents feel they are well informed about the Montessori philosophy and can implement it at home. The nursery holds regular coffee morning meetings where the staff explain to the parents how they can help their children at home. For parents, these are an important opportunity for formal and informal shared discussion in addition to the introductory tour and the Saturday open days at the sister setting. Further information is available on a DVD and their website as well as displays of children's activities in the entrance hall and displays of their work in the classroom. The children's individual art folders are frequently taken home for sharing their work as are the sprouting mung beans.

The children self-register in the morning by placing their name card by their coat peg. During the work cycle the children choose their own activities independently and decide when to have a snack. While one of the practitioners prepares snack by setting out for the children all required items on a table, they can choose to help by cutting or peeling vegetables and fruit. Children are trusted to access learning spontaneously, individually or in small groups, and they work very happily together.

The staff model good behaviour for the children, speaking softly and with respect for each other and for the children. Good induction processes ensure that staff understand their role in providing for the children's welfare and development. Information is shared with the child's next school through visits arranged by the nursery for the child's future teacher.

For reasons of safety children are accompanied by adults on visits to the securely gated pond.

Children are redirected to new activities with respect and invitation. Interactions between children and staff are positive and respectful. Children show due regard for the right of their peers to work undisturbed. Levels of concentration are very good. Outdoor facilities encourage children to respect the environment through recycling wood chippings from the park trees, fruit and vegetable peel, planting and harvesting vegetables, and observing the frogspawn in the pond to learn about the life cycle of a frog.

**Montessori practice: *classroom management***

The classroom is well managed through a combination of planning and spontaneous learning by the children in response to their interests both indoors and outdoors. The morning session has a three hour work cycle which starts at 8.30 a.m. and includes effective free flow access to the garden. It finishes at lunchtime as taking part in circle time at 11.30 a.m. is optional, though children are encouraged to participate. Some children leave at 12 noon while others remain for lunch and the one hour afternoon clubs which consist of sports on Tuesdays, yoga and languages on Wednesdays, and creative club on Thursdays.

The single classroom lends itself well to vertical grouping. Adults are evenly distributed throughout the setting with well-organised written routines to ensure good supervision of children. Activities are primarily child initiated and children maintain cycles of activity throughout the uninterrupted work cycle, and are secure in asking for assistance. Spontaneous groups are formed at the different activities, determined by children's preference. Staff offer appropriate support and encouragement to the children whilst encouraging them to be independent. A key worker system is in operation and all staff write observations on children and file them on their records. The continuous café snack system is effective in enabling children to have a choice of healthy foods and eat at their preferred pace. Extracurricular activities are visits to local places and risk assessment procedures are in place to manage these effectively. The exceptionally good team work contributes to the seamless serenity of this happy learning environment.

**Montessori Practice: *adults' routines and links with parents, including reports and records***

The adults' routines and responsibilities are organised to provide for children's well-being through daily safety set up checks of the classroom and the outdoors. Tasks are usually shared by the whole team on a rota basis. Most new children are supported by the manager during their first few sessions. The team switches roles each day to cater for the children's needs in a flexible manner. Systems are in place for the regular maintenance of the working environment and daily cleaning is organised. Access to the quiet garden is always accompanied because of the pond behind closed gates.

Good opportunities are provided for parental involvement in the nursery. The manager and/or the acting supervisor welcome the children in the morning. Notes are put into a child's bag to communicate something special about the child's day. Parents have the opportunity to attend regular monthly open days to learn more about the Montessori approach. Once per term families are invited to attend to a themed coffee morning, sometimes with a speaker, while end of term parties enable them to rejoice in the children's achievement, to bring and share food and to socialise. Parents feel that they are well informed regarding Montessori methods and classroom practice.

Parents have been informed about EYFS and provided with numerous leaflets, but newsletters which are of good quality are irregular. The new child's learning journey record system is very comprehensive in all areas of learning and successfully integrates the EYFS with the Montessori curriculum. Written reports given to parents could be more informative if they contained greater detail. Reports are sent to the child's next school if requested. Parents are very positive about the daily feedback from staff and the regular parent teacher meetings which can be arranged by appointment at any time. The parents are supportive and have a very high regard for the nursery.

**Staffing:**

Overall this is strong, having excellent teamwork, very good training opportunities available to all staff, and new staff undergo a thorough formal induction process.

The staffing structure of the organisation is clear and supports flexible team working to provide a smoothly managed environment where spontaneity is encouraged. Proprietor support for continued professional development is very strong. Staff are qualified or receive in-house training in Montessori practice, and they have undertaken much training in the past two years. It is evident that training has an impact as staff show awareness of issues of health and safety and display risk assessments undertaken for outings in the adjacent park and other locations. They implement the Montessori approach effectively. The team work is exceptionally good and this creates a very good ambience for the children and enhances their confidence. Detailed job descriptions for staff are in place to cover all positions and documentation reviews take place annually. Photographs of staff are displayed on a notice board in the entrance hall to help new parents identify them.

Minutes of monthly staff meetings are recorded. The proprietor and manager make informal peer observations of staff. Appraisals are carried out annually on all members of staff by the manager and the dietary needs of the children are accessible for staff. Development and staff training action plans are in place.

Annual budgeting is carried out by the proprietor who considers areas for development and purchasing of new materials which complement the Montessori approach to learning. An application for funding for the refurbishment of the nursery is being processed. The provision has a limited budget for resources, so dedicated staff contribute beautifully designed hand-made materials.

Staff share a common sense of purpose in fulfilling the aims and objectives of the setting to provide families with a genuine Montessori nursery. The owner has a strong commitment to the Montessori philosophy and this is mirrored enthusiastically by her staff through their team effort.

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Name of Assessor Anne McConway

Date of report 27 June 2009