



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 the criteria set out in "The Guide to the EYFS in Montessori Settings" (2008). The second visit sought to assess the progress made on the recommendations set out in the report from the first 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.

Maynard Montessori Pre-school

The High Street, Stebbing, Essex CM6 3SH

Dates of the accreditation visits:

Visit 1: 3 February 2012

Visit 2: 26 April 2012

This accreditation report relates to the provision for children aged two to five years.

Description of the school

Maynard Montessori Pre-school is located in the grounds of Stebbing Primary School in the village of Stebbing, Essex. The purpose-built premises consist of one classroom with a carpeted area, solid floor and kitchen area, with toilet facilities for both children and adults including a disabled toilet. There is also a separate staff kitchen and office. The classroom contains a variety of storage cupboards. There is a new outside area just for the nursery children who are also able to use the main playgrounds when the primary school children are not using them, along with a 'Forest School' area on site.

The setting is open term time only, takes children from two to five years old and runs both morning and afternoon sessions. Some of the children stay all day. The morning runs from 8.50 to 13.00 and the afternoon from 12.15 to 14.45 Monday to Friday. The school is registered for 26 children and the number attending varies from day to day, with a total of 50 on roll. There is provision for children with special educational needs (SEN).

Maynard Montessori, together with three other Montessori settings, is run in conjunction with a board of trustees. There are eight members of staff in addition to the principal and manager; many of these work part time. The principal has a full Montessori diploma together with Early Years Professional Status and a BA (Hons) in Childhood and Youth Studies. The manager and three of her team also have the Montessori level 4 diploma, two others have reached Montessori level 2 and one has an NVQ level 2 qualification.



Summary and conclusion

The village location of this pre-school gives the setting a sense of warmth and intimacy. There is a strong partnership with parents and children's achievements are celebrated daily. The staff use their knowledge of Montessori principles to encourage each child to achieve their potential. Observing, planning and record-keeping using both Montessori and Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) principles is one of Maynard's strengths. The children are confident, polite and friendly, they take a real pride in their school. The setting has an open door policy, encouraging parents to be part of this pre-school community.

The staff at Maynard Montessori Pre-school are a team of caring, knowledgeable adults who put the children first in all their planning, ensuring that each child takes a full and active part in the setting. They are extremely flexible, friendly and interact well with the children. Since the first visit, the school has achieved all the points for development by providing more resources for the under threes, replacing the worn sets of Red Rods and Number Rods and updating the staff appraisal system. The school development plan which is regularly updated, demonstrates the setting's commitment to continually reviewing its practice. This ensures the staff meet the challenges of providing exciting and stimulating activities for the children.

The school provides an education in accordance with the principles of the Montessori approach and environment and merits accreditation by the Montessori Evaluation and Accreditation Board

The school has successfully achieved the points for action recommended on the first visit, and should continue working towards best practice.

Philosophy:

There is a clear mission statement and aims and objectives, all of which can be found in the written information given to parents and on the pre-school's website. These documents are reviewed regularly. The school aims to encourage learning by allowing children to explore and offering them freedom of movement between the inside and outside environments. The school uses their observations effectively to help children reach their potential.

As seen during both visits, staff moved easily around the classroom, supporting children when needed. Children are carefully observed by staff and allowed to initiate their own learning. Parents are all aware of the planning, recording and assessment procedures and are encouraged to contribute to their children's learning at home using the Learning Journey Sharing Books.

Parents receive information regarding the Montessori method and the philosophy and principles of Montessori are on display on the notice board along with an explanation of the four EYFS themes.

Learning and Development:

The managers of all four settings in the group meet at the beginning of the academic year; Maynard staff meet half termly to discuss planning. The setting combines both Montessori and the EYFS curricula in their planning. Long term planning reflects Montessori early years school



curriculum, with each Montessori activity mapped to the four key EYFS themes. Medium term planning covers a seasonal theme and is planned for the whole school, while individual children each have a planning sheet.

Individual planning always starts with the child's interests and plans are developed that follow this interest and extend it. Observations are carried out daily and these, along with presentations, are recorded on the setting's Keep Track computer system. Staff are able to take the laptops home in order to write up longer observations and plan their key children's next steps to learning. Planning is a strength of the setting and ensures that the children are able to fulfil their potential.

At the time of second visit, the children were exploring life cycles. There were pictures of the butterfly and hen lifecycles on display, while in the creative area, the children had made clay 'bugs', a butterfly mobile, and on the day of the visit were creating butterfly collages. Some hen eggs, donated by a parent, were being incubated in a small incubator with a chart on the wall showing how many days until the chicks were due to hatch. At the entrance there a whiteboard gives up to date information about the eggs to the parents and when the chicks eventually hatch, they will stay at the nursery for a while before being returned to the owners.

The children are able to move easily between the classroom and outside area whatever the weather, and they are also able to access all areas of the Montessori curriculum. Even the youngest member of the classroom is able to complete their cycle of activity with staff ready to support and encourage them if necessary. The majority of learning that takes place is child-initiated and staff move to wherever they are needed. One member of staff has responsibility for the art and craft area and attends the setting three days a week. Her role is to encourage children to express their creativity in all forms of art. Although she was not present at the time of the second visit, the creative area was well supported by other members of staff.

Children with special educational needs along with their parents are supported by the staff and other outside agencies.

Prepared Environment: resources and materials

The premises are bright, clean and airy. The areas of learning are organised into well-defined Montessori curriculum areas along with a designated art area, snack table, book corner and home corner. The role play provision is rotated in response to children's interests and needs, such as a 'school', set up with a variety of uniforms from local primary schools; this activity is planned as part of the transition process for the children moving on to the Reception Year in September.

There is a good and interesting range of materials and resources in each area and these are rotated regularly. Most of the materials are of good quality and since the initial visit the setting has replaced the well used Red Rods and Number Rods with new sets. A set of materials is also available in the outdoor area.

The resources are appropriate for the age and stage of development of the children. In between the initial and second visit, a variety of puzzles with large, chunky pieces have been purchased by the school, primarily for the under three's but are used by all the children. They have been placed in different areas of the setting including the outdoor space. There is plenty of room for children to work either on the floor or at tables.



Outside there is a covered area with materials and resources from each of the Montessori curriculum areas, an Astroturf play area, sand pit and tarmac area where the children can ride bikes. There are some raised beds where the children grow a variety of vegetables during the growing season and a mini greenhouse. At the time of the first visit, the children were growing bulbs for Mother's Day. There is a 'Music Shed' (a painted shed that contains a variety of musical instruments for children to use) and the school is currently expanding its outdoor water play provision.

There is also a 'Forest School' area which the children may choose to access on Wednesdays. The children are asked individually whether or not they would like take part and they are encouraged to develop self-care skills with dressing for the outdoors as well as remembering the safety ground rules. The children also have access to the primary school's playgrounds when the primary school children are not using them.

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

Children are able to independently access the snack area, see to their personal care, complete their cycle of activity, and if they choose to go outside they are encouraged to put on their own hats, coats and wellies. Younger children are supported in their growing independence by caring staff. At lunchtime children either bring packed lunches or parents choose for their children to have a hot lunch provided by the primary school. They sit at small tables of four to six children together with members of staff. This is a very sociable time with children sharing news with adults and their peers. After lunch, each child washes up his/her plate and utensils before continuing with their activities.

The website and children's Learning Journey Sharing Books offer parents ideas to promote independence at home. The principal also runs occasional workshops on promoting positive language and on the curriculum to ensure a better understanding of Montessori principles.

Children have absolute freedom to choose to work individually or in groups, inside or out from the moment they come into the setting. While staff encourage the children to try new activities, it is the child's decision as to which activity they choose, including whether or not to take part in a spontaneous dance session or visit the 'Forest School'.

Staff model positive language and behaviour and this helps children to treat others with the same respect. Exercises of grace and courtesy reinforce acceptable behaviour. The children are very proud of their environment and willingly help to clean up after themselves including washing and drying their snack cups and plates, sweeping up and vacuuming as well as returning their work to shelves, thus completing their cycle of activity.

Montessori practice: classroom management

The work cycle (which is a minimum of three hours in the morning and two hours in the afternoon) enables the children to access all materials and resources both spontaneously and through some adult-led activities.

As there is only one classroom, the children are vertically grouped. Each child is assigned to a



key person who manages their planning and assessment; but they are free to work with any adult. Music, yoga and cooking are usually offered to the children during the afternoon sessions but only if the children show an interest in taking part in these activities. On Wednesdays, the children have the option to go in small groups to the Forest School.

Montessori Practice: links with parents, including reports and records

All staff have had training in first aid, safeguarding and food hygiene. Each member of staff has responsibility for a particular area of the classroom, ensuring it is clean, well presented and that materials are regularly rotated in order to engage the children. In keeping with good practice, daily risk assessments are carried out both inside and outside.

Observations are carried out daily and are either handwritten or put directly onto the computer system. Record-keeping for each key group is done effectively by the key person.

The Learning Journey Sharing Books are used by staff and parents as a form of two way communication. The children also keep a record of their visits to the Forest School which the parents can see. Parents are encouraged to come and talk to the staff at any time and all are aware of their child's key person. If there are any matters for concern, individual meetings are held and both the parents and staff complete a Parent Consultation Form, detailing the reasons for the meeting, progress of the child and the parents' response to the meeting.

There is one formal parents evening during the year, and at the end of the summer term the parents receive a comprehensive report on their child's progress. The school has a good relationship with a number of local primary schools, and Reception teachers visit the setting ensuring a smooth transition from nursery to Reception. The manager endeavours to arrange for the older children to visit Stebbing Primary School as part of the transition process. The next setting also receives a detailed report.

Staffing:

There is a clear staffing structure with good supporting documentation. The principal is actively involved but the manager runs the setting on a day-to-day basis. The principal, manager and three other members of staff hold level 4 Montessori qualifications, two others hold Montessori level 2 qualifications with another member of staff having an NVQ level 2 qualification. Another member of staff is hoping to start her Montessori training shortly.

There is a thorough induction procedure for all staff and the team meet half termly; these meetings are minuted. There is the flexibility of extra staff meetings should there be a cause for concern. There are informal discussions at the end of the day; a written record is made of these and the staff communicate regularly via email. The manager has recently introduced a new system of peer observations. Since the first visit, the teams at all four settings have worked hard to introduce a new, more workable system of staff appraisals. This is now being used; the manager is very enthusiastic about the new system and feels confident about the way peer observations are being used to feed into the appraisals. These appraisals will be carried out by the manager and her deputy, who has a background in human resources. As with all procedures in the setting, this new system will continue to be monitored.



The team regularly attend a variety of continuing professional development training and feedback useful information to their colleagues.

There is funding available for training and everyday resources. Major pieces of equipment need the agreement of the board of trustees.

This warm, nurturing team of professionals show a clear commitment to Montessori ideals, support each other to achieve their aims, and enthusiastically support the children in their care.

Name of Assessor: Margot Best

Date of reports:

First visit – 3 February 2012

Second visit – 26 April 2012