



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 following 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.

The Montessori Nursery School

The Village Hall, Baker Piece, Kingston Blount, Oxfordshire OX39 4SW

Dates of the accreditation visits:

Visit 1: 20 September 2011

Visit 2: 18 January 2012

This accreditation report relates to the provision for children aged 2½ to 5 years

Description of the school

The Montessori Nursery School, Kingston Blount, was founded in 1990 and has been under the current ownership and management since 2007. The school is located in a spacious, modern hall in a rural Oxfordshire village. The school consists of a large, bright hall, a smaller adjoining room, kitchen, cloakroom and an enclosed nursery garden. Use is also made of a large field and playground, containing climbing frames, swings and other apparatus, adjacent to the school. The school has sole use of the building during opening hours.

The school is open each weekday from 09:00 to 15:00 (12.00 on Fridays) during term times. It is registered for 27 children aged 2½ to 5, with 14 currently on the register. Children attend for a variety of morning, afternoon and full-day sessions. Support is provided for children with special educational needs and for those with English as an additional language.

There are four members of staff of whom two, including the owner/manager, hold Montessori qualifications.

Summary and conclusion

The Montessori Nursery School, Kingston Blount provides a well-organised, age-appropriate Montessori environment where all children are able to fulfil their potential. Knowledgeable, experienced staff, under the strong leadership of the owner, provide for children’s welfare, learning and development needs in a professional and caring manner. Good use is made of the modern, spacious hall, although the outside area is less well utilized.



Over the course of the accreditation process staff have become more confident in their role as observers and in allowing children to work independently.

Staff have a good shared understanding of Montessori principles and these should now be incorporated into the induction programme for new staff and students.

An effective key person system is in operation, facilitating record keeping and liaison with parents. Staff make good use of spontaneous observations to record children's achievements. The recent introduction of a more formal programme of observation and on-going assessment has given staff a better insight into children's needs and interests, leading to more focused planning.

Overall the setting is well-managed, and self-evaluation is valued. On-going staff development is seen as important and forms the basis for continuous improvement. This has been amply demonstrated by the extremely positive response, by all staff, to the accreditation process and the significant developments that have been implemented since the first visit.

The school provides an education which follows the principles of the Montessori approach and environment. The school has successfully achieved the points for action recommended on the first visit, and this merits accreditation by the Montessori Evaluation and Accreditation Board. Consideration should be given to the following points for further development:

- Continue to develop the use of the outside area to provide opportunities for stimulating child-initiated activities across all areas of the curriculum.
- Ensure the staff induction programme includes a clear introduction to Montessori principles and practice.

Philosophy:

The educational principles, goals and philosophy of the setting are clearly set out in the school prospectus and policy documents. They accurately reflect Montessori principles and practice and demonstrate a commitment to, and recognition of, the needs of children and their families. The main aim is to provide a healthy, happy, safe and stimulating environment that supports each child's individual needs. Staff have a very good understanding of these aims, and regular self-evaluation and discussion ensures there is a shared vision for future development. A 2½ hour morning work cycle ensures that the aims are effectively achieved, and staff have become more confident in allowing children to choose freely and work independently. The needs of older children are well considered, with afternoon sessions providing an excellent opportunity for extending children's learning and development through themed activities and outings within the local environment.

Staff are encouraged to reflect upon Montessori principles and practice at regular staff meetings, and this ensures there is a shared understanding of the aims of the school. Induction procedures are being updated to include greater emphasis on Montessori principles.

Most parents say they are happy with the information they get regarding the ethos of the school and the Montessori approach, particularly in regard to freedom, independence and the work



cycle, but some parents would like more information about this.

Learning and Development:

Planning for children is well managed and effectively integrates Montessori activities with the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) curriculum guidance. Staff are responsible for individual planning for their key children, but also work closely with other staff members to contribute to group and individual planning sheets. Changes to the system of observation, assessment and planning, introduced as a result of discussion and training following the first accreditation visit, have had a significant impact on the quality of planning. Staff are now more confident in their use of observation and assessment, giving them a better understanding of each child's needs and interests. As a result planning is now more focused, allowing children to select and complete activities to their own satisfaction, following their own lines of enquiry. They are independent, active learners who work conscientiously on their own, with adults and in small groups. The balance of child-initiated and adult-led activities is highly effective. Adults successfully support children's learning through clear, accurate presentations and well-timed interactions that help children to develop their self-initiated activities further.

The well organized classroom provides for all areas of learning and development, with resources grouped in accordance with the Montessori curriculum. A separate side room offers a useful additional area for group or quiet activities.

Free flow access to the outside area is available for much of the day, but provision for all curriculum areas is much more restricted here due to the sparseness of resources. Additional resources have been introduced following the first accreditation visit, but this remains an area for development.

Vertical grouping within the setting allows children to mix freely across age groups, ensuring each child is able to progress at his/her own rate.

Information for parents regarding the structure of the curriculum, the use of the materials and how these provide the foundations for later learning, is well presented and easily accessible. Partnership with parents is strongly promoted, with parents regularly asked to contribute to the observation and assessment of children's progress.

Prepared Environment: resources and materials

The prepared environment has to be created each morning as the setting is required to pack away at the end of each day. Staff work very hard to create a favourable environment which successfully meets the needs of the children. It is set out clearly and in an orderly way according to curriculum areas. Openly accessible shelves encourage independence and freedom of choice. All available resources are suited to the age and ability levels of the children, and are regularly updated throughout the year as the children develop. All materials are complete, well-maintained, clean and of a high quality.

The large hall allows plenty of space for children to move around freely and to work on the floor, if they choose. Re-organisation of the classroom since the first accreditation visit has increased the space available for the book corner, making it a quieter and more inviting area. Resources indoors are plentiful, with good provision in all areas of the curriculum, including



Montessori materials and appropriate, well-chosen additional activities. Provision for creativity, which was limited at the time of the first accreditation visit, has improved greatly, allowing children to express themselves freely through art, music and role play.

Over the course of the accreditation process the resourcing of the outside area has been reviewed and now provides a wider range of learning opportunities. Continued development in this area is needed to increase interest and motivation for children to use this part of the setting, and to encourage a positive attitude to learning outside (for children and adults).

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

The development of independence is a central aim of the setting, but staff are inconsistent in how they promote this. As a result, children are sometimes unsure whether to do things for themselves. A more co-ordinated approach to helping children to help themselves and to providing opportunities for children to participate in the daily chores, such as cutting the fruit for snack, would further enhance practice

Staff work hard to develop parents' understanding of the importance of independence. Parents comment very positively on this and report that it has enabled them to make very positive changes at home.

The layout of the classroom allows ample space for children to move freely around it, accessing all areas. An effective 'traffic light' system allows children to see for themselves when access to the outside area is available, encouraging freedom of choice and independence.

Children are generally free to form groups spontaneously or work individually, and since the first accreditation visit staff have become more adept at encouraging children to choose from the full range of available activities. As a result the balance of child-initiated, as opposed to adult-led, activities has greatly improved. Role modeling by staff and older children helps new children to settle quickly and promotes a sense of respect for the environment and each other. Older children are encouraged to look after younger children and 'show them the ropes', for example pairing up to go to the play area.

Montessori practice: classroom management

The open plan layout of the nursery allows children to mix freely regardless of age, to the benefit of all children. Younger (new) children benefit greatly from the vertical grouping as they quickly learn routines and self-help skills by watching and engaging with older children.

Staff work very well as a team, recreating the classroom each morning and packing it away at the end of the day. This allows consideration to be given to the needs of the children, with adjustments being made to the prepared environment as children progress and develop. Resources are carefully checked daily to ensure they are suitable and in good order.

A clear statement of classroom procedures and daily routines is available for all staff, and is shared with parents. Children are appropriately supervised at all times and staff have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities. The work cycle begins as soon as the children arrive and continues for at least 2½ hours, allowing children to select and repeat activities as



often as they wish. Group and adult-led activities are integrated into the work cycle alongside the children's freely chosen activities. A rolling snack time allows children to take a break at a time that suits them and lunch provides an opportunity for conversation and the development of self-help skills. This is good practice.

Key people provide a secure base for children as they arrive, allowing children to settle quickly. The key person is responsible for observations, record-keeping and liaising with parents. However, there is close collaboration between staff in this regard and children are free to interact with any member of staff, creating an affectionate, family atmosphere.

Montessori Practice: links with parents, including reports and records

Daily safety checks and other daily procedures, regular safeguarding training, risk assessments and fire practices ensure children are suitably cared for and their welfare needs fully met at all times.

The environment is very well maintained throughout the day, with adults and children clearing away activities as they finish with them. Adults act as very good role models and encourage children to be responsible for their environment.

Staff make brief, spontaneous observations throughout the session, and have recently introduced a programme of longer, planned observations allowing staff to gain a deeper insight into the children's needs and interests. Overall, record-keeping is excellent. New systems have been introduced to monitor the quality of Learning Journeys, to ensure consistency and to make the links between observation, assessment and planning clearer and more informative.

Partnership with parents is good, and begins before children start at the setting. Parents appreciate the opportunity to attend information evenings and introductory sessions. An initial profile form, completed by parents when their child enters the setting, forms the basis of an ongoing dialogue.

Communication with parents is fostered further through a variety of means, including newsletters, an open door policy and regular parents' evenings. Parents receive a detailed end of year report which highlights children's learning and development, linking the Montessori activities to the EYFS and Early Learning Goals. Parents value this feedback and feel they have a very accurate picture of their child's progress and development. Next steps and/or ideas for support that could be given at home are not given, and these would be a valuable addition.

Staffing:

Strong leadership and low staff turnover results in staff working very well as a team. Safeguarding procedures, including those for recruitment, ensure suitability of staff. All staff are required to follow Montessori philosophy. Induction procedures for new staff focus on safeguarding, daily routines and planning, and since the first accreditation visit the principal has begun a review of the induction process to include initial training on Montessori principles and practice for all new staff.

Although job descriptions are generic, with very little differentiation for individuals, staff are clear about their roles and responsibilities, which are outlined in the school's operational plan.



Regular staff meetings are held, allowing the team to share ideas and discuss priorities for development. Brief minutes are kept, providing an overview of discussions and decisions, but give no indication of responsibilities, timescales or how success will be measured. New procedures, introduced as a result of the accreditation process are beginning to address this. Staff appraisal, which includes self-evaluation, is carried out annually and provides a useful tool for identifying areas for development and training needs. At present no observations of staff are carried out by the principal, but this is being reviewed.

Professional development is viewed as very important and each member of staff has an individual staff development plan. All staff attend a range of training, which is then shared with the whole team.

A positive approach to self-evaluation throughout the setting lays the foundations for continuous improvement of their Montessori early years practice. This is exemplified by the positive attitude of all staff to the accreditation process and the proactive manner in which the action plan has been implemented.

Name of Assessor: Chris Manville

Date of reports:

First visit – 30 September 2011

Second visit – 18 January 2012