



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.

Caterpillars Montessori Nursery School

Appleton Hall, West Green Road, Hartley Wintney, Hants RG27 8RE

Dates of the accreditation visits:

Visit 1: 9 November 2011.

Visit 2: 27 February 2012.

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

Description of the school

Caterpillars Montessori Nursery School was established in 1996 and is privately owned. It operates from two rooms in Hartley Wintney’s village hall and has the use of an enclosed outdoor area. The main hall is spacious and is divided into the areas of the Montessori curriculum; the additional room is used occasionally for extracurricular activities such as French, Spanish and music sessions. There is a storage room and a kitchen. Children have access to the outdoor area from the main hall. The additional room also has an enclosed grassed outdoor area and a tarmac area is also used for gross motor activities such as riding bikes and scooters.

Caterpillars Montessori is registered for 38 children aged from two to five years. There are currently 45 children on roll. The nursery supports children with special educational needs, special dietary needs and children who speak English as an additional language. Children attend from the local and surrounding rural areas for a variety of sessions. The nursery operates morning and afternoon sessions from Mondays to Thursdays, and only morning sessions on Fridays. Morning sessions run from 9:00 until 12:30 and afternoon sessions run from 12:30 until 15:30.

Snack is offered to all children during sessions and there is a choice of cooked lunches provided by Caterpillars Montessori or lunch boxes provided by parents. The setting operates during term time and offers a summer holiday club.



There are currently nine members of staff (including the proprietor, manager and deputy), seven hold Montessori qualifications, one of whom also has a BA (Hons) degree in Early Years. The other two members of the team are working towards the Montessori diploma, one is a qualified teacher.

All members of staff work on a part-time basis including the proprietor, manager and deputy, therefore a well implemented key person system is in place for each session.

Summary and conclusion:

Caterpillars Montessori offers a loving, caring and well prepared learning environment for children. All members of staff place strong emphasis on guiding the 'unique child' towards confidence and independence, as well as working in close partnership with parents. The proprietor and her staff are enthusiastic, passionate and committed to providing a high quality Montessori nursery school for the children, where learning is fun. The strong teamwork amongst staff creates a harmonious environment, where children are able to explore and discover at their own pace. During the second visit, consideration was given to issues raised during the first visit, which all members of staff have taken on board in a professional manner. They have successfully made improvements to their daily routine with the children by introducing healthy snacks, and have reviewed some aspects of the staff self-evaluation procedure to enable members of staff to reflect on their practice when working with young children.

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:

- The staff self-evaluation process should be scheduled so that it becomes a regular, useful tool and one that can be routinely linked to continued professional development.
- Further opportunities for independence might be offered to the children by involving them in the daily mealtime routines such as preparing snack and setting tables.

Philosophy:

Caterpillars Montessori's aim is to guide the children towards independence and confidence within a carefully planned and prepared environment. The principles, goals and philosophy are defined in writing in the *Aims at Caterpillars Montessori* document, which is available on the website, as well as in the information pack for parents. These are reviewed regularly.

The website also provides detailed information about the daily routine and Montessori philosophy. There is a written statement of classroom procedures.

Independence is encouraged through the daily routine. A three hour work cycle is available, with children free to choose activities both indoors and outdoors. The outdoor area is a well



planned extension of the indoor environment.

Children choose and complete their activities independently and the adults only step in if help is needed. During the first visit some children spent most of the morning and afternoon sessions exploring the outdoor environment. On the day of the second visit the children's opportunity to choose their activity was equally evident. Staff observe and listen to the individual child's interests and needs, as well as regularly exchanging information with parents on their child's progress.

Learning and Development:

Caterpillars Montessori puts strong emphasis on following the individual child's interests. Both indoor and outdoor environments provide all areas of Montessori learning, along with book and creative corners. There is an allocated snack area with washing-up facilities for the children. All age groups play together in the large hall, where each member of staff is allocated to a group of key children. All members of staff plan the topics together in their yearly plan. Medium- and short-term plans are monthly and weekly topics and festivals, these are flexible to reflect the children's interests and they are linked with the monthly individual development plans. For example, the teachers observed a child who showed great interest in elephants, which he shared with his peers, and the weekly topic was changed to accommodate this interest.

The Montessori areas of learning are linked with the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) early learning goals in the child's individual learning journey. All members of staff exchange information with parents through the *Individual Child Information records*. The children are observed effectively by their key persons and next steps are planned based on these observations.

Teachers and parents contribute towards the child's learning journey with samples of the child's work, notes and photos. Next steps are also shared with parents, which are agreed and signed by parents and the child's key person once a term. The children can take their learning journey book home on a daily basis.

Weekly topics are also displayed on the news board for parents, so discussions about their child's activities at Caterpillars Montessori are encouraged at home.

Special needs are identified through observation and appropriate measures are implemented to support children.

The children have opportunities to work individually or in groups, both indoors and outdoors, during the full work cycle. Children are free to join in extra group activities such as French, Spanish, stories, music, art and cultural topic work (as seen during the second visit when St. David's day celebrations were offered but not made compulsory). The strong teamwork amongst staff creates a well balanced, spontaneous learning environment for children through child-initiated and adult-led activities.



Prepared Environment: resources and materials

The materials and the learning environment are well maintained and regularly checked, as both indoor and outdoor areas are set up and tidied away on a daily basis. The hall is in use by other members of the local community outside the nursery school hours.

The apparatus is arranged on shelves at a suitable height for children. The wide range of Montessori materials are well organised, of high quality, age appropriate and easily accessible for the children both indoors and outdoors.

The outdoor area is well planned and an extension of the indoor Montessori areas of learning. The materials are carefully selected to provide opportunities for children for child-initiated activities such as water and sand play, building tools, and chalk board. The outdoor equipment is stored in the shed. Children are free to ask teachers for any additional materials needed for their role-play.

One of the parents commented that she chose Caterpillars Montessori because it was a well organised, structured, stimulating and clean environment with high quality learning materials available both indoors and outdoors.

All areas of learning are regularly reviewed by the staff in order to ensure that they are meeting the children's interests, ages and stages of development.

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

The children have many opportunities to develop independence at Caterpillars, such as hanging up their coats and sorting their belongings. Independence in personal hygiene is also effectively encouraged and they clean their glasses and plates in the washing-up area after finishing snack.

Since the first assessment visit all members of staff have reviewed the meal time routine with the children. Vegetable and fruit waste is now recycled, children and parents have been introduced to a 'healthy eating' scheme and healthy snacks are offered to the children. At lunch time the tables are set with plates, cups and cutlery by the adults. Further opportunities for independence could be offered to the children by involving them in the daily mealtime routine, such as preparing snack and setting tables.

The teachers are positive role models within the environment, listening to the children, getting down to their eye level, as well as using gentle tones and body language in guiding them. The children are free to engage in activities individually or in groups, therefore, the environment encourages turn-taking, sharing and freedom of choice both inside and out.

Since the first assessment visit all members of staff have reviewed and developed their understanding of re-directing a child to a new activity, thereby enhancing their practice when working with the children.

The children enjoy taking turns in looking after the nursery's pet, an African giant snail named Ugo; each child takes turns in taking Ugo home for the weekend.



Parents are well informed about the daily routine at Caterpillars and how they can encourage their child's independence at home, including advice on toilet training.

Montessori practice: classroom management

All members of staff are aware of their roles and responsibilities and help create a harmonious working environment for both the adults and the children. A rota system of daily responsibilities is displayed in the classroom, therefore all members of staff are fully aware of the learning areas they have to supervise and maintain during the three hour work-cycle.

The vertical age grouping works well and there is a well organised key person system in place, with two key staff allocated to a group of children with a main key person and an emergency cover key person. Both key people keep daily observation records on their children and exchange information effectively. Strong team work is evident amongst all members of staff, who provide a loving, caring, child-centred and stimulating indoor and outdoor learning environment.

During the second visit children joined in the extracurricular activity (French lesson) in small groups of five to eight children. The other children were able to carry on with their chosen activity until they were ready to join, if they so wished.

Montessori Practice: links with parents, including reports and records

Communication with parents is outstanding. The teachers and parents contribute to the child's learning journey and assess observations together, planning the child's next steps jointly on a termly basis. Parents comment on the positive input from the partnership approach of Caterpillar's staff, and how beneficial the meetings are in relation to helping their child's learning and development at both home and nursery. The key person system gives children a sense of security – parents comment on the fact that children know who to go to if feeling upset or concerned.

Those that are new to the setting receive detailed and useful information and all members of staff make themselves available to speak to parents. Parents comment on the openness of staff and the ease with which they can discuss issues with them, as well as being well informed about the ongoing development of the setting. For example, since the first visit staff have involved parents in the development of their healthy eating scheme through newsletters and discussion.

There are many opportunities for parents to engage with staff in both formal and informal ways; there are monthly newsletters about events, current themes, and ways to support children's learning at home. Parents receive regular updates of the weekly topics on the news board outside the classroom. They are also able to access the daily routine and additional literature on Montessori education through the website. Events and workshops are organized and links with the local primary school are established.

Policies and procedures are reviewed once a year by all members of staff and parents.



Children's records are kept safely and children's dietary needs and allergies are noted. When a child leaves Caterpillars Montessori parents receive a detailed written assessment of their child's achievements, covering all areas of learning within Montessori and the EYFS curriculum.

A recent survey of parents showed that they are very pleased with the level of information they receive, the quality of the provision and the rate of progress achieved by the children.

Staffing:

Caterpillars Montessori has a clearly defined management structure with detailed job descriptions, full induction and a welcome pack for staff. As a result, staff are clear about their roles and responsibilities and feel well supported by senior staff. Teamwork is good, with all staff being aware of the need to support one another and to ensure that ratios and supervision are always appropriate.

The proprietor, manager and deputy work closely together with staff, which enables them to monitor and develop provision to the benefit of all. They ensure that trained staff and trainees have a shared understanding and commitment to the Montessori approach by allocating a mentor on a voluntary basis.

Since the first assessment visit, the proprietor, manager and deputy have implemented a system to develop staff's self-evaluation through peer on peer observations, which are evaluated. The feedback from staff on this new process has been positive, as it enables all members of the team to reflect on their practice and consider their continued professional development (CPD) needs. It is important that this new self-evaluation process is scheduled, so that it becomes a regular, useful tool and one that can be routinely linked to CPD.

Staff have undergone a wide range of training provided by the local authority, including special needs, child protection and first aid courses. However, all members of staff would benefit from more in-house training.

Detailed records are kept of staff meetings, showing what has been discussed and indication of the outcome of those discussions. There are opportunities for all staff to contribute to the whole nursery development plan and there is good capacity for development in the setting.

The proprietor and her staff are enthusiastic and passionate in their work and they are committed to providing high quality, warm and loving Montessori provision for children and their families by continuously reflecting on their practice when working with the children.

Name of Assessor: Andrea Dalling

Date of report: 1st March 2012.

First visit – 9 November 2011.

Second visit – 27 February 2012.