

# **Montessori Evaluation and Accreditation Board**

## **School Accreditation**

This report follows an accreditation visit made on behalf of the Montessori Evaluation and Accreditation Board. It considers how far the school follows Montessori approaches. 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.

### **Cherry Trees Nursery and Preparatory School Children's House**

Flempton Road, Risby, Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk IP28 6QJ

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

Cherry Trees is a rural nursery and primary/preparatory school that has grown considerably since it was founded in 1982. The school consists of a purpose built nursery unit for children aged 3 months to 3 years, a Montessori Children's House for 3-5 year olds, a large hall with classrooms attached (Reception to Year 3), separate Years 4, 5 and 6 classrooms, science, drama, music and art blocks, office and kitchens. Outside the school has a tarmac playground, sensory garden, tennis courts, adventure playground, gardening area and separate nursery play area. The whole school is set in eight acres of grounds. Cherry Trees is open from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday to Friday, and is registered for 128 children under five years of age.

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

Cherry Trees Children's House is thoroughly committed to Montessori principles, goals and philosophy. This is reflected in the information given to parents. Staff have comprehensive induction procedures which are particularly important as not all staff are currently Montessori trained and as a result the implementation of Montessori principles is sometimes inconsistent.

The Principal and Nursery Managers provide good leadership within the Children's House and all staff members have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities. Staff meetings are held regularly with appropriate records kept.

The Children's House environment provides a good range of Montessori and other materials which are freely available to the children over a two to three hour work cycle. The school benefits from an excellent outdoor environment which is often used to enhance the learning opportunities for the children.

Vertical grouping is used to good effect within the Children's House with ample opportunity for children to learn from each other. However at present children move to the Reception Class at the age of four if they are staying at Cherry Trees beyond Year 1.

Staff act as good role models within the classroom and encourage the children's independence. Children are able to work without interruption for much of the time.

When staff give presentations of new activities these are clear and accurate. There is a good balance between child-initiated and adult-led activities. Observation and record keeping are good.

Liaison with parents is very strong with information regarding Montessori principles, school events and children's progress presented in a variety of formats.

**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 further development is needed in the following areas:**

- Ensuring consistency of practice amongst all staff with regard to Montessori principles, goals and philosophy by introducing a formal programme of staff observations by senior managers.
- Ensuring that the mentors for new staff are qualified to Montessori Diploma level.
- Show links between Montessori and the Early Years Foundation Stage more clearly in record keeping and planning documentation, including narrative observation.
- Further integrate group activities into work cycle to allow children to continue with their own activities if they choose not to join in.
- Extending opportunities for free flow between the indoor and outdoor environments and extend the range of activities available to children outside during the work cycle.
- Provide a wider range of activities for older/more able children, and integrate the Children's House and Reception classes to provide a fully vertically grouped experience from 3 to 5/6

**Philosophy:**

The principles, goals and philosophy of Cherry Trees Children's House are clearly set out within the school prospectus and on the school website. Further information is available at Parent Induction Evenings and on the notice boards in each classroom.

Cherry Trees clearly sets out to follow Montessori principles, goals and philosophy whilst acknowledging

the need to follow the Early Years Foundation Stage Curriculum and to abide by current legislation. Regular reviews of the principles, goals and philosophy of the school are carried out by senior managers and shared with staff through staff meetings and adaptations to the induction process. Staff are able to contribute to these reviews through questionnaires and consultation.

The implementation of Montessori principles, goals and philosophy within the Children's House is generally good, although there are some inconsistencies in staff practice, for example pointing out and correcting children's mistakes, and calling across the classroom, or where visiting/peripatetic staff are not sufficiently aware of Montessori practice.

A more rigorous use of staff observations by senior managers, and ensuring that induction and mentoring responsibilities are undertaken by staff qualified to Montessori Diploma Level, would help to identify and alleviate these inconsistencies.

At the age of four, children who are staying at Cherry Trees transfer to the Reception Class. Those that will be going on to a state Primary School stay in the Children's House until they leave. Keeping all children in the Children's House until Year 1 would allow them all to benefit from the resulting three year vertical grouping.

### **Curriculum:**

Cherry Trees School Children's House follows a hybrid Montessori/Foundation Stage curriculum which is implemented following Montessori principles. Planning is carried out for the nursery as a whole, for the individual classrooms and for individual children. Planning is good and is carried out on a termly, weekly and daily basis to ensure flexibility in response to children's needs and interests.

The Children's House has an appointed Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO) and Deputy SENCO to identify and monitor children with Special Educational Needs. This system is working very well. The school has good relationships with outside agencies who offer additional support where necessary.

Staff keep comprehensive and up to date records of children's progress and achievements. Montessori Individual Records are also kept and are updated at less regular intervals.

The nursery has a free, extended work cycle which allows children to choose their own activities for most of the morning session. This allows the staff to adapt the curriculum to the individual needs of each child. Activities are available outside but access to these is controlled by staff. New patio doors allowing free flow access to the outside learning area are planned.

### **Resources and materials:**

Cherry Trees is well equipped with Montessori and other materials but these are not always as freely or widely available as they could be. Resources are shared between classes (both in the Children's House and the Reception Class) which means that particular resources are not always available just when an individual child wants it.

Most of the resources are systematically ordered but some shelves contain resources from different curriculum areas. Practical life, sensorial, maths and literacy materials are easily accessible and generally well maintained. Cultural materials are less apparent and tend to be stored out of sight. Some of the resources are cramped on shelves that are not really big enough to accommodate them, so restricting children's choices. Complete sets of early maths and literacy materials are available in each classroom. A good range of additional activities are available to supplement the Montessori materials. These additional

activities fit well with Montessori principles. Children are able to move freely between the two classrooms, thereby increasing their choice.

### **Staffing**

The staff at Cherry Trees School Children's House work very well as a team under the leadership of two joint nursery managers and the Principal. A detailed and comprehensive staff handbook provides a clear outline of staff roles and responsibilities, and includes a full range of policy and procedure documents. There is a clear and effective induction process for new staff. This includes the provision of a mentor and a range of tasks designed to introduce each member of staff to the essential policies, procedures and ethos of the school. The main elements of Montessori principles and practice are also covered. Cherry Trees benefits from having a Montessori tutor and Montessori Teaching Practice Tutor on the staff. All staff in the Children's House hold appropriate early years and/or Montessori qualifications. Montessori qualifications are not a condition of employment but staff in the Children's House are encouraged to study for a certificate or diploma level Montessori qualification if they do not already hold one. Staff training needs are being identified through annual staff appraisals. All nursery staff have undergone Safeguarding Children and First Aid training. In-house training is planned for August 2008 in preparation for the introduction of the EYFS.

Senior managers observe staff regularly as part of the appraisal process but these observations are not recorded.

Regular staff meetings are held for Children's House staff as well as whole school staff meetings. Minutes are kept of items discussed, decisions reached and information given to staff.

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

The children in Cherry Trees Children's House are generally very independent. They are able to select, work with and complete activities in their own time. When children choose to have a snack they are able to set the table with crockery and cups, cut their own fruit and wash up at the end without any interference from adults. When the camera needs new batteries one of the children is asked to go on an errand to fetch some more. The children are clearly used to moving around the school buildings. The school makes a great effort to encourage parents to back up the work of the school at home.

Freedom to choose is very evident within the classrooms, including the freedom to sit out for a while.

There is less freedom with regard to access to the outside environment. The school has excellent outdoor provision, but this is not being used to its full potential as there are currently no procedures in place to allow for free flow between the indoor and outdoor environment. Ground rules are used effectively by most staff to provide clear and consistent boundaries. As a result the children have a lot of self-discipline.

Overall though the children are well-behaved, polite and courteous to each other, the staff and to visitors. Staff show a lot of respect for the children and their work and rarely interrupt unnecessarily. However, staff do occasionally point out and correct children's mistakes rather than allowing them to learn from their own exploration of the materials.

**Montessori practice: *classroom management***

A two to three hour work cycle is aimed for each day depending on the timing of extra curricula activities such as music, dance and French. These activities are scheduled for the beginning of the morning where possible. This approach provides a good opportunity for an uninterrupted work cycle on most days. Staff are deployed appropriately between the classrooms to ensure that children are adequately monitored at all times. A key worker system is in place with each member of staff having up to eight key children whose progress and development they monitor. However, staff aim to develop positive relationships with all the children in the setting and will contribute observations and planning suggestions in relation to all the children.

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

Cherry Trees School has clearly defined working practices and adult routines to ensure the smooth running of the Children's House. Time is made available for daily adaptations to planning and the environment. Staff may not be making full use of this time as some aspects of the environment, such as the layout and distribution of materials, are in need of attention. There is an effective system of daily risk assessment to ensure the safety of the children.

Effective records of the activities engaged in by each child each day are kept using short, spontaneous observations. A structured programme of planned, focused observations would make a more detailed evaluation of children's development and learning possible.

Liaison with parents is very good. An effective open door policy provides a good opportunity for parents and staff to discuss school events or issues relating to individual children on a daily basis. Newsletters are sent home termly and parents' evenings are held once a year. A parents' notice board in the entrance to the Children's House provides a further means of communication.

Staff update children's records regularly, with Foundation Stage Step by Step Booklets being more up to date than the Individual Montessori Records.

End of year reports are well written and provide a comprehensive, easily understood summary of each child's development and learning.