



# **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.

### **The Denning Montessori School**

Fawley Village Hall, Fawley, near Henley-on-Thames, RG9 6JA

Dates of the accreditation visits:

Visit 1: 2 March 2012

Visit 2: 9 May 2012

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

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

Denning Montessori School is situated in the village hall in the rural village of Fawley, near Henley-on-Thames. The hall consists of one large room which the school uses as the main classroom, a smaller room for music and small group activities, a kitchen, two toilets, an office and a storage area. The outside area comprises two securely fenced gardens, the smaller of which is used for free-flow from the main classroom. The larger garden is accessed through a gate from the small garden and contains wooden climbing structures and balancing beams surrounded by safety bark on the ground. The children also have access to a nearby copse, which is used as a Forest School once a week. Although the hall is occasionally used by local residents the school rarely has to pack away entirely.

The school was opened in 1991 by the current head teacher and she continues to run it with the help of her deputy (who is a full-time teacher), two part-time teachers who job share and a part-time administrator. The head teacher holds a Montessori international diploma, a Montessori advanced diploma, an NNEB qualification and an award in First Line Management (level 3). Two other teachers also hold the international Montessori diploma, and one member of the team has commenced Montessori studies. The head teacher undertakes the SENCo and safeguarding officer roles for the school and she and her deputy have both recently completed Forest School training.

Denning Montessori school is open during term-time from 9.10 to 12.10, with a lunch/afternoon session from 12.10 to 16.00 on Tuesdays and Wednesdays and until 13.00 on Thursdays. A holiday club also runs during the summer break. French lessons are offered to the children on Tuesdays from 11.00 to 11.30 in the smaller room and dance lessons are offered on Mondays



from 11.30 to 12.00. Children are free to join these or to continue with other activities. The school is registered for a maximum of 18 children aged 2 to 5 years, there are 28 children on roll, and it supports children with English as an additional language and those with special educational needs. The school has been awarded the Buckinghamshire Quality Assurance Award.

## Summary and conclusion

The Denning Montessori School is a well-established school much valued by parents, many of whom have used the school over a number of years. The head teacher and her team are excellent role-models for the children and they are very supportive of each other. All of the staff are committed to continued professional development and to creating a calm, welcoming space where children can learn to be independent and to enjoy being part of a group.

***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 point for further development:***

- To continue with the provision of 'free-flow' learning, allowing children continuous access to both the indoor and outdoor environments.

## Philosophy:

The aims and objectives of the school are laid out in the Aims and Objectives brochure, and in the Prospectus, Parent's Handbook, and Staff Handbook. These state that the school follows Montessori principles and philosophy. In preparation for weekly staff meetings the teachers reflect on Montessori principles which are chosen and discussed as a team.

The children and their needs are at the heart of this nursery. The staff know them very well because of skilful observation and regular reflections on each child's development. They ensure that there are sufficient opportunities to challenge and develop the child. The staff trust the children and have high expectations of them, and the children are free to follow their interests throughout the work cycle, with as much or as little support from staff as they require.

The daily routines are displayed in the main classroom; these are designed to fit around the child. Staff work with parents (and if necessary with local agencies) to gain a whole picture of each child and their individual needs.

## Learning and Development:

The school's approach to learning and development is detailed and thorough. Staff plan together at weekly meetings. Long term planning combines Montessori and Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) areas of learning. Short term planning is done for individual children on a weekly basis. It is set out in key children groups, but all staff contribute to the planning, observations and records of all children. Each staff member uses small observation forms which have recently been re-designed to include prompts about EYFS and Montessori areas of



learning. These are completed as staff observe a child carrying out an activity, they are entered in the child's records by the key person and are used to inform planning. Additional short term planning (such as seasonal activities and role play provision) is also discussed at staff meetings. All Montessori areas of learning are present across the indoor and outdoor environments and the adults effectively facilitate learning by being responsive to the children.

The main classroom is divided into subject areas and all of the activities are easily accessed by the children. There is a designated snack area which the children use as they please; this has been designed as an integral element of the work cycle as the children pour water from a jug to wash their hands, pour their own drinks, prepare their own fruit and tidy up after themselves. There is a well-equipped role-play area, a book corner and a computer table. The children confidently put on their outdoor clothes and can go into the smaller outdoor garden at any time, accompanied by an adult. The work-cycle is three hours in length and children are free to follow their interests, working with self-chosen activities, making good use of the vertical grouping and accessing adult-led activities if they wish to.

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

The Montessori materials and non-Montessori materials are systematically arranged on low level shelving to ensure that the children have easy access to them. There is an acceptable range of materials and these are of good quality and sufficient for the number of children using them. The practical life activities are particularly appealing and crockery and glass jugs are used. All materials supplied for the children are complete and clean and clearly a great deal of thought has gone into the range of activities provided to ensure that they are appropriate for the developmental stages of the children attending the school. There is sufficient space for children to work on their own, in groups, at tables or comfortably on the floor. The outdoor environment is well-equipped with activities to challenge the children, such as building with pipes and blocks, and some Montessori materials are provided in a shelter for the children to use outside. Since the first visit an all-weather surface has been laid in the outdoor classroom. Before the children arrive the adults check that the materials – inside and outside – are complete, safe and ready for the children to use.

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

The environment has been arranged to give children the maximum opportunity for developing independence. When they arrive they self-register using name cards and remove their outdoor clothes. Children talk to each other and plan aloud how they will work together – what they need, who is going to collect what. They are very co-operative and supportive towards one another, reminding each other of daily routines. The snack area is self-service and the children prepare their own snack. Cleaning materials are provided for the children to clean up after themselves and they remind each other to put their work away.

Children move freely into the smaller classroom, which has areas for music and named drawers where they can put their possessions and any work that they would like to take home. In the outdoor environment the children help to care for plants, including vegetables, using appropriately sized gardening tools. The work cycle is of sufficient length that children can take as much time with their chosen activities as they please. The staff celebrate the children's achievements: they show their pride in the children, trust and encourage them, but are also



skilful at knowing when to intervene.

The school supports children's independence at home by giving parents information about how they can help, including a leaflet giving ideas for introducing life skill learning opportunities at home. Montessori principles and the importance of independence are shared with parents at termly parent information evenings and there is also a lending library of books for parents to borrow. Each term the school holds parent afternoons when parents visit individually to discuss their own child's interests, learning and progress. The adults model good manners and speak respectfully to each other and to the children, and they are mindful of being consistent with ground rules.

### **Montessori practice: classroom management**

The head teacher is committed to implementing good Montessori practice throughout the school, and she encourages her staff to reflect on all aspects of their practice as well as the development of the children.

The recent introduction of free-flow between the classroom and the outside area has been very successful in extending the work cycle and this is illustrated by how well the children concentrate on their chosen tasks, not feeling pressured to move on until they are ready. It is recommended that the setting continues to offer and develop this 'free flow' access between the indoor and outdoor learning environments. The only exception to this is the one morning per week when the children go to their nearby Forest School. The work cycle is also implemented on the two afternoons that the school is open.

The school operates a key person system; however, in practice, as the nursery is small, all staff work with all children as the need arises. New children are settled by their key person and as far as possible, nappy changing is done by their key person. The staff work as a team to ensure that all areas of the school are supervised in accordance with legal ratios and the needs of the children.

### **Montessori Practice: links with parents, including reports and records**

The safety of the children is given the highest priority in this school. A full risk assessment is performed annually and details of safety checks to be performed daily are clearly displayed and there are very clearly designated roles and responsibilities for all staff. Safety is an agenda point at all weekly staff meetings. The school has a comprehensive set of policies and procedures to which all staff contribute and these are reviewed on a rolling basis. Since the first visit a statement of how the school assesses the quality of teaching has been added to the policies and procedures.

Before the children arrive each day the staff liaise with each other to prepare the indoor and outdoor environments. All staff contribute to the children's records, which are given to parents when the child leaves the school, a summative report is also prepared for the next school.

The school's links with parents are excellent, and parents are very appreciative of the care their children receive. These links begin before children join the school, with home visits and "All About Me" booklets completed by parents to inform the nursery about their child's development and interests. Parents are welcomed at the start of each session by a staff member who records



any new information given about the children. At the end of the session the staff member gives parents a verbal report on their child's progress. Parent afternoons are organised so that parents can meet with their child's key person to view their records and discuss progress and their interests. Parent information evenings with themes such as "helping your child to read and write the Montessori way" provide them with information about Montessori education and how they can support their child at home. The head teacher sends electronic forms to parents during the holidays to find out what new experiences their children have had, and regular newsletters are also sent to each family. When considering free-flow for the children, the head teacher prepared an informative document for the parents which outlined the benefits of outdoor play. Parents are invited to events such as the nativity play, sports day and outings.

**Staffing:**

The head teacher owns the school and runs it on a day to day basis, working full time and with responsibility for a key children group and for administration. She has 25 years of Montessori experience. Her practice with regards to her staff is thorough and supportive. She works closely with the deputy who has 15 years of Montessori experience, works full time, and also has responsibility for a key children group.

All staff have detailed job descriptions, with Montessori priorities highlighted, and these are reviewed at annual appraisals. Since the first visit the head teacher has implemented a programme of observations of staff by the management team. Each member of staff has a detailed personnel file with evidence of training undertaken and statutory checks. There is also a training audit file which shows training taken and planned for each member of staff. This demonstrates real commitment to continued professional development. The head teacher, her deputy and two of the teachers hold the international Montessori diploma. The other teacher has just commenced Montessori training.

The team hold weekly staff meetings which are minuted, and they reflect regularly on their practice in accordance with the Buckinghamshire Quality Assurance (BQA) – detailed modules show how they have already reflected on and improved practice. They have also used the Ofsted Self Evaluation Form to reflect and improve. In line with the BQA the school has a thorough induction process for new staff that runs over a three month period.

The head teacher continually monitors the resources in the school, replacing them as necessary, and the staff can recommend items to be purchased with money raised from fund-raising activities.

The head teacher and staff of Denning Montessori School show high levels of commitment to Montessori practice in all areas of the school. They have created a safe, inspiring environment for the children and are supported by an appreciative body of parents.

Name of Assessor: Susie Norman

Dates of reports:

First visit – 7<sup>th</sup> March 2012

Second visit – 14<sup>th</sup> May 2012