



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.

Flitch Green Montessori Pre-school

Tanton Road, Flitch Green, Great Dunmow, Essex CM6 3GG

Dates of the accreditation visits:

Visit 1: 24 February 2012

Visit 2: 10 May 2012

This accreditation report relates to the provision for children aged 2 to 5 years old.

Description of the school

Flitch Green Montessori pre-school opened in 2009. It moved to its present purpose-built premises in September 2011. It is located in the grounds of Flitch Green Academy (a primary school) and the building consists of a large carpeted area, solid floor area and kitchen, as well as toilet facilities, a staff kitchen and a pre-school office. There is a dedicated outside space for the nursery children who are also able to access the main playgrounds when the primary schoolchildren are not using them.

The pre-school is open term time only, Monday to Friday and runs two sessions a day. The morning session runs from 8.50 to 12.50 and the afternoon from 12.50 to 15.20. It is registered to take 30 children between the ages of 2 to 5 years old and presently has 65 children on roll who attend a variety of sessions. There is provision for children with special educational needs (SEN).

The principal runs the pre-school in conjunction with a board of trustees. Although she takes an active part in running this and three other nurseries, the main day-to-day organization is carried out by a manager. The principal holds a full Montessori diploma together with a degree in Childhood and Youth Studies and Early Years Professional Status. The manager also holds a full Montessori diploma, as do four of her seven strong team, while the others have appropriate childcare qualifications.



Summary and conclusion

Fritch Green Montessori is a lively, thriving pre-school. It has already established a good reputation in the three years it has been open. The staff have worked hard to make the environment friendly and welcoming to both children and their families.

The staff work well together as a team and their enthusiasm for the Montessori method is reflected in the confidence and friendliness of the children. This is a young, caring team of professionals that regularly review their practice and whose vitality is a real strength of the setting.

Since the first visit, the setting has put in place a new appraisal system and updated their job descriptions. The team have made great improvements in their outdoor space and will continue to develop activities that engage the children's interest. Staff continue to demonstrate their commitment to Montessori ideals.

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 provide activities and resources outdoors that reflect the indoor environment and support children's learning.

Philosophy:

There is a clear mission statement together with aims and objectives that can be found on the school's website and in the pre-school handbook (a copy of this is kept in the entrance hall of the pre-school). Its aims reflect Montessori philosophy and include encouraging freedom of movement, self expression through creativity, self discipline and caring for others and the environment. These aims are understood and implemented well by the staff and are reviewed periodically.

During both visits, staff supported the children in their activities both inside and outdoors. Parents are especially welcome and spend time settling their children into an activity when they arrive in the morning and talking to staff. They are made to feel very welcome.

Parents are aware of the daily routines and the planning, recording and assessment procedures which are detailed in the pre-school handbook. They are seen as their child's first and most important educators. A parents' notice board displays information about Montessori principles and the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) themes as well as local community events.

Learning and Development:

The managers of all four settings in the group meet at the start of the academic year. The Fritch Green team also meet half termly. The long term planning is a continuous provision ensuring all areas of the Montessori curriculum are linked to the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) themes. Medium term planning reflects the changes in the seasons; displays in the



Cultural section depict the lifecycle of the butterfly and a collage of other mini-beasts, created by the children. Significant events such as the naming of the recently acquired guinea pigs are noted on a weekly planning sheet.

Individual planning begins with the child and is either handwritten on planning sheets or put directly on to the pre-school's Keep Track computerised planning and recording system. Observations and presentations are also recorded on this system which links Montessori activities to the EYFS areas for development. This system enables staff to easily plan for future learning and to respond to individual interests and needs.

The children are able to access all areas of the Montessori curriculum during the uninterrupted work cycles. Staff give presentations to extend children's learning and allow them time to repeat activities. There were plenty of opportunities for spontaneous learning both inside and outdoors and during both visits the weather was dry enough for the children to spend a great deal of the session outdoors enjoying the sunshine. This outstanding practice is most successful.

Children with special educational needs and their families are well supported by staff who liaise with the appropriate outside agencies.

Prepared Environment: resources and materials

The classroom is organized into well defined Montessori areas of learning with resources on low shelving that is easily accessible to all the children. There is a good range of resources that are regularly rotated in order to engage the children's interest. They are all of good quality, suitable for all the ages and stages of development with plenty of activities for the under 3's. There are sufficient resources in all sections for several children to work there at the same time. Indoors, there is also a snack area, art and craft area, book corner and construction area.

There is a good outdoor space. A hard-surfaced covered area runs along the length of the building which opens onto grass. Under the covered area there is some low shelving containing bats and balls, puzzles and some Practical Life activities, several tables and chairs and a shed for the bikes and scooters. There is also an easel and paints and the guinea pig hutch. On the grass there is a slide and a large sandpit as well as a small gravel area used for digging. Along the side of the building there is a patio area used for bike riding and more physical play. At present, the school has not yet been able to fully extend the inside learning environment to the outside and consideration should be given to ways of providing further learning opportunities in the outdoor space. In between the first and second visits, extra resources and activities have been added to the outdoor area to reflect the indoor environment, however there is potential for further development.

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

Children are given time to complete their cycle of activity, encouraged to dress and undress themselves and look after their personal care. Even the youngest child is particularly well supported in these activities. The rolling snack gives children the opportunity to choose when they want to eat and this area is monitored by a member of staff.

The children help staff to set up the lunch tables at around midday and lunch time is a very



sociable event. The snack/lunch area is small but there are plans to take up some of the carpet tiles and extend the hard floor area; this is planned for September. At the moment, the children bring a packed lunch but there is the possibility of hot lunches being provided by the primary school in the near future. As part of the transition process, children moving on to primary school in September have lunch in the main school hall during the summer term. After lunch, children help to tidy away, sweep the floor and clean the tables.

Parents have noticed a growing independence in their children at home; that they put their toys away without being reminded and treat their own toys with more respect. Staff will happily give advice to parents either verbally or via the Learning Journey Sharing Books.

Children have the freedom to work where they want, with any adult, not just their key person, individually or with friends. Staff gently remind children of the guidelines such as tucking chairs in under tables. They encourage the children to try new activities as part of their next steps of learning.

Children's achievements are celebrated on the class 'Wow' board, where staff can record and feed back to parents any significant steps forward in their child's independence. Staff act as strong role models for the children, continuing to promote positive behaviour by their actions in the classroom.

Montessori practice: classroom management

There are two uninterrupted work cycles (three hours in the morning and 2½ hours in the afternoon). There is a smooth transition between the two sessions with morning children being collected from the front entrance and afternoon children being dropped off at the rear entrance.

With just one classroom, the children are vertically grouped with older children helping the younger ones. Children are able to work spontaneously either inside or outdoors with staff supporting the children in both environments. There are staff rotas to ensure that all areas, both inside and out are monitored and these duties are shared out equally. Time for staff to observe their key children is also timetabled. These new rotas have only recently been introduced after discussions between the staff. Since the first visit, staff have discussed the rotas again and amended them. It was felt that observations should take place spontaneously rather than at a set time.

On the second visit, there were a larger number of younger children in attendance, making it even more important for ground rules to be reinforced when necessary. Staff responded to the needs of the younger children by presenting activities appropriate to their stage of development.

Extracurricular activities such as cooking, yoga and P.E. are offered to the children but only if they wish to participate. The day on which they take place varies from week to week, which is done to give children who attend on different days the opportunity to take part if they wish. The children are able to use the main school hall for the more physical activities; this avoids disturbing the other children who do not wish to take part.

On the day of the second visit, a cooking activity took place. This activity was available to the children during both the morning and afternoon sessions giving all the children attending the option to participate. Although the first group was large and quite lively, it was well managed



as were the other groups observed.

Montessori Practice: links with parents, including reports and records

Daily risk assessments are carried out by the staff, both inside and out. They have all had training in first aid, safeguarding children and food hygiene. They share the responsibility of maintaining and cleaning the classroom and outdoor space. Regular environmental audits are carried out by staff to ensure that the environment continues to offer interesting opportunities for learning.

Staff make daily observations of the children which are transferred onto the computer system. It is each key person's responsibility to ensure that records are kept up to date.

The Learning Journey Sharing Books are used to inform parents of their child's progress and parents are encouraged to add their own comments. Parents receive half termly newsletters that contain information regarding future events and important dates at the school. The pre-school has an open door policy and parents are delighted with the feedback they receive from the staff and feel able to come and talk to staff if they have any concerns or simply want more information on their child's progress. On these occasions, a parent consultation form is completed by both the key person and parents.

Parents are encouraged to participate in school life by signing up to the reading rota, accompanying the children on outings and donating resources. A parent has donated some strawberry plants that are beginning to flower in the garden. A future open evening is planned when the parents will be invited to come along and meet the trustees as well as other parents.

There are two formal parent evenings a year and these take place in October and the Spring. At the end of a child's time at Flich Green, parents get a comprehensive written report linked to the EYFS, detailing their child's achievements. A copy of this, following parental consent, is forwarded to the child's next setting.

Staff routines and the partnership with parents ensure that the children are fully supported in their learning and development.

Staffing:

The principal takes an active part in the life of the pre-school. She holds a full Montessori diploma, BA (Hons) in Childhood and Youth Studies and also has Early Years Professional Status. The manager is responsible for the day to day management of the school and seven other members of staff. She also holds a full Montessori diploma together with four other members of the team. One member of staff holds an NVQ level 2 qualification, one a foundation degree in early years and the other member of staff has no formal qualification but has 20 years experience in early years practice.

The induction system is clear and well documented. Peer observations take place which feed into the appraisal system. Following the initial visit, the new appraisal system, which is now carried out by the manager, is firmly in place. Staff have found the feedback from their peer observations and subsequent appraisals have helped in identifying their strengths and areas that may require some extra professional development. As with all new procedures in the setting,



this will continue to be monitored

Staff discuss matters informally at the end of each day and have twice termly formal meetings which are minuted. The school also completes an annual school development plan detailing points for action; this is regularly updated by the manager with input from all staff.

Everyday resources and funding for training are procured with the approval of the Principal but major items of expenditure require the approval of the board of trustees.

The Fitch Green team work well together. They are committed to creating a joy for learning in the children, encouraging independence and compassion for their environment, with the Montessori ethos as their guiding principle.

Name of Assessor: Margot Best

Date of reports:

First visit – 24/2/12

Second visit – 10/5/12