



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) and subsequent 2012 revisions. 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.

Kingfisher Montessori Nursery School

Clements End Road, Gaddesden Row, Hemel Hempstead, Herts HP2 6AG

Date of first re-accreditation visit: 23rd March 2012

Date of second re-accreditation visit: 29th June 2012

Date of original accreditation: March 2009

This accreditation report relates to the provision for children aged 1 to 4 years

Description of the school

Kingfisher Montessori Nursery School opened in September 2007. It is a rural setting, housed in the village hall surrounded by open countryside; registered for 22 children, it currently has 25 on roll, aged one to four years. Children attend full time, half day or sessional hours. The nursery is open during term time, Monday and Friday from 9.00 until 15.00, and Tuesday and Thursday from 8.30 until 17.00, when a breakfast and after school club are offered. It is privately owned, with an appointed manager.

There are two classrooms, one for the older children, whilst the other has a dual purpose of being a baby room in the morning when needed and, in the afternoon, a room for quiet activities. There is a small outside area to the front and rear of the property with digging pit, log benches and stools for creative activities and Montessori exercises, large shrubs and trees for dens and climbing and a grassed area for buggies and rugs. Off the main classroom is a kitchen with access to the outside areas and to the rear there are separate toilets for children and adults. At the entrance is a small cloakroom area, with named coat pegs and information boards.

There are two full time and five part time members of staff (plus two peripatetic teachers for French and music). Of these, three have Montessori diplomas (ranging from birth to 12 years) and one has Early Years Professional Status (EYPS). The other staff have or are working towards early years qualifications.

The nursery is able to support children with additional needs.



Summary and conclusion

Kingfisher nursery benefits from a loyal and supportive parent body, who entrust the care of their children to a team of dedicated and enthusiastic staff. The team's strength is their ability to communicate with both adults and children.

The personal development of staff has been enhanced by the recent introduction of a system of regular management observation and review. The embedding of the peer review system would enhance personal development further. By using different observational techniques staff can further evaluate and improve practice and provision. A training record has been successfully introduced. This indicates training needs and the recently introduced management observations to inform points for appraisal, thus providing the setting with useful tools to assist in planning for staffing needs and career progression.

The team uses the Montessori approach effectively, which is an important factor in parental choice of provision. Children are happy and confident, and parents are impressed with their high levels of independence and by the progress they make.

The school provides an education which follows the principles of the Montessori approach and environment. The school has successfully addressed 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:

- Include different observation techniques to review practice and provision.
- Enable staff to observe each other in peer on peer review to complement the newly introduced management team observations.

Philosophy:

Kingfisher Montessori follows the child in every way: in the planning, observations, documentation, communication and response to all children throughout their school day. Staff constantly observe and communicate with each other and the progress of each child, commenting on where they are at, where they have come from and where they could be going. This is done unobtrusively, showing clear knowledge of Montessori sensitive periods and respecting the inner needs of the child.

Staff trust the children and this is shown in the way they give clear directions and then allow the child to carry out the instructions independently, for example, asking a child to find the tissues, so they could wipe their own nose. By careful observation without interfering, they encourage the children to help themselves. When children specifically ask for help, staff demonstrate and then step back to allow them to complete their task. When a child speaks about an interest they may have, they are directed to an activity that will extend and enhance that interest. Children complete cycles of activity and adhere to the classroom rules, which are sensitively reinforced by the staff.

The setting's goals, principles and philosophy are clearly defined in writing. They encompass the Montessori philosophy of following the child and describe the role of the teacher. These principles are implicit in the way all staff treat the children in their care.

**Learning and Development:**

The main room is divided into the Montessori areas of learning and the activities are arranged to enable the children to access them by themselves. A smaller room off the main room is used by the under twos in the morning, where a stair gate is in place to restrict access by the older children. There is an area for sleeping and low level shelves with Montessori and other age-appropriate materials.

Kingfisher offers a range of learning experiences beyond the core Montessori curriculum including French, music and movement, and baking. The work cycle is three hours long including the optional circle time at the beginning of the day for music or French.

Children have free flow access to the garden where the outside classroom becomes a natural extension of the inside, as well as providing opportunities for sustained creative and role play activities. Staff observe the children and follow their interests and needs by resourcing the outside on a daily basis, with activities of particular interest to the children that day. Snack and lunch may also take place outside depending on the weather and the nature of the children. During the first visit the weather was exceptionally good, so the children were outside for the whole day, including lunch. In contrast, during the second visit it rained all morning and the children showed no interest in going outside until after lunch. Their needs were sensitively met in both circumstances.

There are plenty of learning opportunities available for the children both inside and out and staff are available to meet the needs of every child. They observe individual children as they carry out their various activities and make notes on their developmental readiness to progress. Learning journeys are created every term. A booklet of photos matched to learning goals are put together with some examples of the child's work. A written progress report in the areas of learning is sent to the parents with the learning journey booklet.

The planning system works effectively. The nursery has long term plans for topic work, which are used to inform weekly short term planning through review and evaluation. Individual planning for children is prepared weekly using the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) framework and a Montessori activities checklist: comprehensive observations are made and next steps planned. The nursery plans to reintroduce a comprehensive individual record book which maps Montessori areas of learning to the revised EYFS framework.

Prepared Environment: resources and materials

Kingfisher has a wide range of both Montessori and other complementary materials, which are arranged on low-level accessible shelving units around the room and organized in Montessori curriculum areas. Staff have developed the art and craft area extensively to excellent effect. There is plenty of floor space and low-level tables and chairs in each area of learning. In the baby room there is an area for sleeping and shelving units with age appropriate materials, easily accessible to the under two age range.

The outside area has been developed to include wooden log benches and stools for creative activities and Montessori exercises, plus a wooden digging pit. Staff take pride in ensuring the shelves are ordered and materials are checked daily for completeness, with activities removed from the shelf if they are defective or deficient. Children are gently reminded by the adults to



complete cycles of activities, ensuring exercises are ready for another child to enjoy.

Since the introduction of more focused observation and review, staff are able to adapt the environment to meet the needs of the children in their care. Between the two visits, they reorganized and extended the Exercises for Everyday Living and introduced cushions for children to use when looking at books, thereby increasing the freedom to choose where in the room they sat.

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

Independence and choice is fostered from the moment the children enter the nursery. They are greeted at the door by the staff and then they hang up their coats and change their shoes. Children immediately start work if they wish, or they place their mat in a circle if they would rather wait for the group activity. The work cycle is three hours long and includes free flow to the outside using a 'traffic light' system to monitor ratios. All children have access to the baby room in the afternoon, where there is a range of resources for role play and construction. During the morning a stair gate restricts older children from entering the baby room and thus allowing the under twos to have appropriate materials available on low-level shelves and a quiet area for sleeping.

Children are free to have snack throughout the session, being offered fruit and toast which they butter themselves. If help is requested this is given unobtrusively, allowing the children to continue to help themselves. They are trusted to access their learning spontaneously, with staff on hand to extend their interest further with learning activities according to their needs, be it individually, in small groups or as a whole. Respect for the environment is enhanced by the promotion of the cycle of activity and this further enforces respect for each other, helping to ensure that all children have access to the activities on offer.

There is a high level of respect throughout the nursery, particularly from the parents for the care and education their children receive. Parents comment on how independent their children have become and staff encourage parents to continue with skills the children have learnt in school.

There are clear classroom ground rules for both child and teacher, ensuring that a calm and harmonious atmosphere is maintained throughout.

Montessori practice: classroom management

At Kingfisher freedom is given within the prepared environments and staff follow the needs of the group, adapting routines to fit with the children; for example lunch may be earlier and may be set up outside, or the baby room may be available at different times as the need arises. The nursery is not bound by its timetable, this is only an indication of what is available on a particular day.

During the first visit all but the group activities observed were child-led, spontaneous presentations. The introduction of the Montessori checklist for record keeping and for planning next steps has given staff the focus to direct adult-led presentations as appropriate.



The adults have clear roles and responsibilities, supported by graceful leadership from the manager throughout the day, ensuring that the distribution of adults matches the needs of the children.

A strength of Kingfisher Montessori is how they manage the extracurricular activities they offer, whilst still maintaining their ethos. Extracurricular activities of French, baking and music and movement are offered each week. Parents are invited to join the French and music and movement as observers or participants on specified dates. These activities take place at the beginning of the work cycle which minimizes disruption and allows for freedom of choice and free flow within the classroom.

Children are vertically grouped, with the 1 to 2 year olds benefiting from a separate classroom for the morning work cycle.

Montessori Practice: links with parents, including reports and records

A strength of Kingfisher Montessori is the high regard that the parents have for the care and education provided for their children. Parents are very complimentary about the lessons on grace and courtesy implicit within the ethos of the nursery and how these impact on their child's behaviour outside school. There are family events planned throughout the year and newsletters are produced twice termly.

Every parent knows their child's Key Person, with whom they are able to communicate daily. All Key Persons make observations of their children and contribute to their learning journeys. The manager, under supervision of the one of the proprietors, is responsible for the weekly plans and monitoring next steps. The successful inclusion of links between the Montessori curriculum and the EYFS within the planning and recording documents for the children boosts the staff's and parents' understanding of Montessori practice in the context of the requirements of the EYFS.

The roles and responsibilities of the staff are clearly documented and understood. The children are well cared for.

Staffing:

Kingfisher Montessori is run by a team of dedicated and enthusiastic early years practitioners. The proprietors are in daily contact with the manager and thereby contribute to mentoring and managing the staff. Although, in this small team the majority of staff are not yet Montessori trained, they all embody the ethos and understand the philosophy, which is apparent in the way they interact with the children and each other. By including in their job descriptions the requirement for all staff to support the Montessori curriculum, the management team is empowered to monitor the quality of Montessori provision and make decisions on further training needs.

The induction process is thorough and well documented. Continued evaluation of peer on peer and management observations will help to further identify and enhance good practice and facilitate staff development. The recent introduction of a record of the continued professional development training that staff have undertaken is also enabling the manager to identify further training needs more easily.



Staff at Kingfisher Montessori are enthusiastic and committed to Montessori practice and continually look to ways of improving the quality of their provision.

Name of Assessor: Denys Lyne

Date of reports: First visit – 29th March 2012
 Second visit - 1st July 2012