



# **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.

### **Peacock Montessori School**

Stuston, Diss, Norfolk IP214AD

Date of first accreditation visit: 17 November 2011

Date of second accreditation visit: 17 January 2012

This accreditation report relates to the provision for children aged six months to five years

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

Peacock Montessori School is a privately owned Montessori nursery situated in the rural village of Stuston near Diss. The school's building is adjacent to a working farm that also includes a farm shop and animal petting area. The building consists of an entrance hall, one main classroom, a 'creative' room, a baby sleeping room, a kitchen, an office, staff toilet and children's toilets. The outside area incorporates two grassed gardens, which include a vegetable patch, a digging flower-bed, a wooden play-house and a wooden climbing wall. There is also a covered barn that includes recently installed sand and pebble discovery areas.

The school provides full day care for 26 children, of whom six are under 2 years of age, 12 are between 2 and 3 years of age and eight are between 3 and 5 years of age. There are currently 52 children on roll, and the school is open for 51 weeks of the year.

Peacock Montessori School operates a free flow policy with children having the freedom to move from one area to another as they wish. The school offers a morning session from 08:00 to 12:00 and an afternoon session from 12:00 to 18:00; most children attend for a full day. French and dance tuition are offered as extracurricular activities and these are scheduled for Monday afternoons after the daily work cycle.

There are seven members of staff (including the owner), all of whom hold a recognised childcare qualification. The owner is the head teacher; she holds a Montessori Diploma and completed her Montessori Foundation Degree in December 2011. She is also the Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCo). The nursery is able to support children with special educational needs and English as an additional language. The manager holds an NVQ Level 4 in Early Years and another staff member gained a Montessori Foundation Degree in December



2011. One staff member holds an NVQ 3 in Early Years and 3 staff members hold a Level 2 NVQ with one of these working towards a Level 3.

### **Summary and conclusion**

Peacock Montessori School is a happy and energetic Montessori setting which is valued highly by the parents and carers of the children attending the school. The environment is spacious and flexible and the head teacher has plans for further development to support children's learning and independence. Recently introduced procedures will enable the staff to assess children's learning more effectively and will enable the management team to evaluate the quality of teaching. Planning and record-keeping procedures show good links to the EYFS. The management and staff are excellent role models for the children and they share a commitment to continued professional development.

***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:***

- To continue with the plans to provide further opportunities for the development of children's independence at lunchtime.
- To continue the review of the layout and resources in the classrooms so that they meet the needs of all children attending the setting.

### **Philosophy:**

Peacock Montessori School is an authentic Montessori environment offering children a wide variety of activities to explore in their own time. The school is an excellent example of the benefits of vertical age grouping. Older children are eager to help the babies, and children as young as eight months are motivated to try new skills by watching the older children who move around confidently and independently.

The three hour work cycle is embedded in the practice of the school. Many children arrive already knowing what they want to do first, confident that they may choose freely to work indoors or outdoors. Most of the staff are skilful at supporting children's independence and encouraging them to try new activities. The children show a high level of trust and respect for the adults who clearly know the children very well.

The setting's educational principles, goals and philosophy are stated in writing in the Operational Plan and in the Parent's Welcome Pack, and these are reviewed annually. They state that their aim is to encourage children to reach their full potential by choosing, sampling and doing for themselves, which accurately reflects the Montessori philosophy.

### **Learning and Development:**

The staff of Peacock Montessori School are working hard to ensure that all areas of learning are represented and appropriate to the wide range of developmental stages of children attending. The children have constant access to the indoor and outdoor environments for the full work cycle of three hours but many children constantly choose the outdoor area. Recent reorganisation of the classrooms has made the indoor areas of learning more comfortable and



appealing to the children. The head teacher and her staff should continue their reflective practice in this area. Overall there is a good balance of adult-led activities and opportunities for spontaneous learning (such as experimenting with sand and pebbles). The outdoor area includes a covered barn which means that children can comfortably be outdoors in all weathers.

All members of staff are involved in the planning process, which is done with regard to the Montessori areas of learning and the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). A medium-term plan covers the whole term, and staff take turns to formulate weekly plans which take into account reflections and evaluation by staff at their weekly staff meetings, thus ensuring that the children are provided with good opportunities to learn and develop in all areas of the curriculum. They differentiate planning to ensure that all children of differing ability, whether due to age or special educational needs, can be included. Each child has an individual EYFS record card which maps their individual journey. Although the Key Person normally completes these daily, any member of staff can record observations of any child. These observations are supported with photographs and provide the basis of the child's next steps. The school also uses the 'Keep Track' computer programme to record observations, specifying which Early Years step has been fulfilled. Every child has a recently introduced 'Montessori areas of learning' sheet.

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

The quality, suitability, and range of Montessori materials available are acceptable. The Montessori areas of learning have recently been re-organised and there is sufficient space for children to work at tables or on the floor, in groups or individually. The re-introduction of table mats and floor mats mean that children are able to define their work areas.

Outdoor activities include a slope and a wooden climbing wall which allow children to take risks safely, and a wooden playhouse which encourages imaginative play – it was an ice-cream shop on the day of the visit. Some Montessori materials are available to the children outside.

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

Fostering children's independence is a major strength of the school. The children show their independence as they move confidently from one environment to another and the staff observe carefully to ensure that they remove obstacles to children's independence wherever possible. As an example, the head teacher has recently solved the problem of children requiring an adult to help them to get their coat from the locked coat area by providing a rack of special 'outdoor coats', thus enabling children to go outdoors without asking an adult for help.

Some children arrive at school in the morning with a clear idea of what they want to do first and staff immediately support them with this by encouraging them to think of what they will need, for instance "Do you need to keep your coat on if you are going straight outside?" There is a high level of respect between the staff and the children and this is reflected in the children's attitudes to each other. They are careful and gentle with each other and show respect for animals, such as a cat who sometimes visits the school. The children feel secure in their learning, knowing that they can work on a task for as long as they like and as often as they like.

As part of the recommended review of the indoor environment, some staff based in the classrooms require training to ensure that they are conscious of the group as a whole and not



just of the child with whom they are sitting. Throughout the morning the children have access to snack, however some opportunities for independence and social learning are lost at lunchtime as each child brings a lunchbox and these are left on the table for the children to eat from. The head teacher has recently consulted with the parents and is developing a plan to ensure that the children's independence at lunchtime is as high as during the rest of the day.

The lay-out of the school and the free flow access to the indoor and outdoor environment encourages the children to become independent, and parents report that their children display high levels of independence at home. Children take care of the environment, sweeping up when they have spilled items and they are careful to return activities when they have finished with them.

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

The head teacher is extremely committed to implementing good Montessori practice throughout the school, and she continues to encourage her staff to reflect on all aspects of their development. The recent establishment of an extended work cycle (now three hours) has been very successful and this is illustrated by how well the children concentrate on their chosen tasks, not feeling pressured to move on until they are ready to do so.

Due to the vertical grouping of children the school has a real family-feel, with older children watching and commenting as babies are fed in the same room that they are working in. The head teacher feels strongly that the 'Key Person' method has brought real benefits to the staff and children, as it gives the children a feeling of security knowing that they can always go to someone who knows them really well if they need help or comfort.

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

All staff are involved in planning for the school. Medium and short-term planning is linked to the EYFS and Montessori, and children's interests are identified by staff at weekly staff meetings and used to plan each child's 'next-step'. Children's records, based on the EYFS, are kept in individual files called 'Learning Journeys', which give an informative picture of the child's development. These comprise spontaneous and longer observations of children as well as photographs and detailed summaries from the 'Keep Track' system, which links Montessori activities to the EYFS. Since the first visit a Montessori Individual Learning Plan has been developed and added to children's files.

When the children leave the nursery their Learning Journeys are given to their parents to be passed to the child's next school. A summary sheet/short report has recently been developed and this will be a useful assessment tool for the next school, as well as for other carers of children attending the school. It is intended that summary sheets will be prepared termly for each child. This is a useful practice.

The head teacher and the manager ensure that staff understand their responsibilities, through inductions, regular staff meetings and detailed job descriptions. The routine of the school runs smoothly because staff work well together as a team.

The school's links with parents are outstanding. Parents speak very highly of the head teacher and her staff and feel that they do all they can to help parents as well as the children. One



parent commented that their child's independence is comparatively very well developed, and parents report that their children love to come to school and have formed deep attachments to the adults at the school. Some parents have attended a 'Montessori Evening' and feel that the information they received has helped them to extend their children's independence at home. Parents have received information about the school's 'Key Person' policy and they know who their child's key person is. They receive regular newsletters and Parents Evenings are timed to fit in with family schedules. The school organizes family activities such as an Easter Bonnet competition, 'Mum's Night Out' and a Christmas Concert. An annual questionnaire is sent to all parents so that they can comment on the service offered by the school.

**Staffing:**

All staff employed at the school hold a recognized childcare qualification and the head teacher and one of her staff completed the Montessori Foundation Degree in December 2011. Two further staff members will be commencing the Montessori Diploma in 2012 and one staff member will be undertaking level 6 Early Years training in January 2012. Staff who have not had any formal Montessori training feel informed and included because the head teacher ensures that they have access to in-house training about the Montessori philosophy. All staff have attended external courses in first aid and safeguarding children.

On joining the school each member of staff is given a Welcome Pack which includes a plan of the school, policies and procedures and information about the services offered by the school. There is a Staff Induction Manual in the Operational Plan which is available to all staff and parents at all times. Staff meetings are held weekly and these are minuted with actions allocated to members of staff. Each member of staff has a detailed job description which is reviewed at their annual appraisals. This is good practice.

Currently the staff undertake short peer observations. In addition, the head teacher has recently established a programme of longer observations of her staff by the school manager and these will be used to help her staff to reflect on their development and plan their continued professional development. The owner/head teacher and manager of Peacock Montessori school have a strong vision of how they want the school to move forward and they are committed to supporting their staff in learning more about the Montessori philosophy and using this in their work with the children.

Name of Assessor: Susie Norman

Date of report: 19<sup>th</sup> January 2012

First visit: 17<sup>th</sup> November 2011

Second visit: 17<sup>th</sup> January 2012