

Montessori Evaluation and Accreditation Board

School Accreditation

This report is prepared following an accreditation visit 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”.

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.

Stebbing Primary School

The High Street, Stebbing, Essex, CM6 3SH.
Date of accreditation visit: 17 November 2010

This accreditation report relates to the provision for children from Reception to Year 6

Description of the school:

This Local Authority Primary school was established in 1878 and serves the local rural community. There are 116 pupils on roll in five classrooms from Reception to Year Six. Four and five year olds attend Reception and Year One classes; they share resources and a large range of outdoor activities. Six and seven year olds, eight and nine year olds and ten and eleven year olds are vertically grouped in three classrooms.

All children benefit from full day provision from 09:00 to 15:00 during term time and have access to a hot school lunch which is prepared on the premises. The school is located in large grounds which include tarmac at the front and a playing field, wildlife area, a small kitchen garden, outdoor swimming pool and AstroTurf, used for sports activities, at the back of the school.

There are seven teachers who are supported by a team of up to 18 teaching assistants (TAs) and several visiting professionals such as French and jazz music teachers. About 10% of children have a Special Educational Need (SEN) and are supported by specialist help provided by the Local Authority. Three teachers have undertaken Montessori training and two TAs have completed Level 2 Montessori Foundation course.

Summary and conclusion.

Stebbing Primary School is a warm and welcoming school where all children are eager to learn, and demonstrate genuine care and respect for each other and their environment. The school appointed a new Head Teacher in September 2010 and her vision and enthusiasm for Montessori philosophy is evident throughout the school and it is embedded in practice and followed by all staff. Reception and Year 1 are fully equipped Montessori learning environments and deliver the Montessori approach in conjunction with the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) and the National Curriculum. Children’s learning and development is assessed and monitored through observations and staff discussion. The older children in the school benefit from the Montessori ethos of autonomy, trust, respect and strong

community spirit within the school. The needs of children with SENs are very well met, with good Local Authority support. The school is well organized and offers a wide and comprehensive range of learning materials and resources both inside and outside. Children are happy and independent and move freely and confidently throughout the school. They demonstrate good levels of concentration and knowledge of their topics. Teachers demonstrate excellent knowledge of the Montessori approach and work as a highly committed team under the strong leadership of the Head Teacher.

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 consideration should be given to the following points for further development :

- Ensure that all information for parents and new staff about the school incorporates the Montessori philosophy and that this information is shared with parents and staff both in published materials and at meetings.
- Ensure that present and future staff continue their professional development by formal training in Montessori theory and practice.

Philosophy:

The school is committed to high standards of behaviour and achievement allowing children to excel and become inspiring independent learners. These high expectations are first introduced in Key Stage 1 using the Montessori approach of respecting the child and nurturing freedom and self discipline. This ethos is well embedded throughout the school and is clearly expressed in the school prospectus; however there are only a few specific references to the school's Montessori commitment.

The school values the role it plays within the local community and they have recently made progress in developing strong links in this area by, for example, exhibiting children's art in a new local art gallery.

All teachers are committed to developing individual children's potential autonomy and self discipline. This is evident when children are able to make choices in their work and in their ability to concentrate in chosen tasks. The staff's genuine respect for each child results in high levels of motivation. Each child is encouraged to monitor their own progress. Staff organise and support learning by careful planning and assessment, using observations to support the child's individual learning and interest.

Parents are aware of the school ethos and are supportive of the Montessori practice which they see as a contributing factor to their child's progress and achievements.

Learning and Development:

The Montessori approach is strongly adhered to in Reception and Year One where children benefit from a fully prepared learning environment and have access to the full range of Montessori materials, which they use throughout the three hour work cycle. This encourages a

high level of spontaneous learning and the development of independence, confidence and courteous behaviour. Throughout the work cycle children have the opportunity to work outside or inside. Teachers are very skilled at meeting all children's developmental needs as well as extending children's learning at every opportunity, such as children being encouraged to look for brick patterns around the school as part of a building project.

Learning is planned and organized through topic work that is carefully selected by the children each term. Staff show skill in ensuring that all areas of learning and development are covered by directing children towards appropriate activities and following their interest. The organization of learning and the classroom and outdoor area layout is carefully planned to effectively support children in their spontaneous learning. This is evident throughout the school and is one of its strengths demonstrating that the Montessori ethos is understood by all across the school.

Careful consideration has been given to optimising learning by encouraging children to work in pairs as 'learning mentors'. This approach encourages awareness of the needs of others and positive social relationships as well as a growing sense of community within the school. The best example of this practice is when Year 6 children work together to help younger children during lunch.

The children's learning and development is recorded and assessed through observations. Each child has their own folder to which each member of the classroom team contributes with observations, photographs and examples of work. Children participate in decision making by deciding if they wish their work to be included. These observations and a well-designed and comprehensive Montessori materials list inform staff of the appropriate next step and future individual planning.

Prepared Environment: resources and materials:

There is a comprehensive range of purchased and handmade Montessori materials as well as many other good resources both inside and out. They are arranged systematically and are complete, tidy and readily accessible to all children. There are plenty of resources to cater for the number of children attending and there are well-designed and resourced cooking areas that fully support independence as units are at child height.

This organization of the learning environment is evident throughout the school and really supports the ability of children to choose freely. All children are comfortable accessing all areas of the school even though it is quite a complex set of buildings. During the accreditation visit a visually impaired girl confidently skipped from her classroom to the library.

The atmosphere in the school is welcoming both for children and parents and promotes a strong sense of community. Bright and appealing wall displays and glass Diwali pots add to the atmosphere.

The classrooms are spacious and well organized with sufficient space for a sofa and a well thought out book areas. Younger children enjoy artwork displayed at their eye level.

All children, staff and parents contribute to the school's high standards by participating in

looking after their environment with care and respect and clearing away their work after activities.

Montessori practice: independence:

All morning sessions start with a 'coming together' when teachers explain the key learning points for the day. Children are then encouraged to follow their interest and choose from the activities on offer. The teacher's role is that of a facilitator moving from table to table or floor encouraging and supporting learning as needed.

Children's ability to express their ideas and communicate their needs are supported by effective reflective listening and appropriate open ended questioning which results in good understanding. As they are given the freedom to choose, children have the ability to focus and engage with activities, repeat them as required and consolidate their learning.

There is strong evidence of children working independently, in pairs or in small groups throughout the school and this practice greatly supports children's unique leaning styles and individual rhythms. This contributes to the warm and harmonious atmosphere throughout the school.

Parents have some understanding of Montessori philosophy through attending Parents evenings, Christmas fairs and sport events and informally by offering to help and watching what happens in the classroom. The school organises regular information evenings about Montessori education prior to children entering Reception class; it does so in conjunction with Maynards Montessori Nursery, located in the school grounds and managed by Stebbing Montessori Charitable Trust.

Montessori practice: classroom management:

All staff are clearly aware of their roles and responsibilities and are adept at ensuring the classrooms are organized in such a way as to encourage genuine freedom, spontaneous learning and an understanding of acceptable behaviour.

Learning is encouraged individually or in small groups and there is a good balance of teacher led and child-initiated activities. Staff are comfortable in altering routines and personnel allocation, should children choose to work outside. Visiting professionals offer tuition in jazz music and French. The school welcomes parents and grandparents to assist with project work and to read to the children, encouraging a warm community atmosphere. This is extended by vertical grouping and set responsibilities for Year 6 children, such as a child being in charge of organising lunchtime music.

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

Parents talk positively about the school and comment on how open and approachable all staff are. They are happy with the information they receive about their children through written reports and viewing their children's folders at parents' evenings. Parents are informed about daily matters through regular newsletters, a web site, seasonal fairs and through the school's open and welcoming policy.

There is a strong working relationship between the nursery and the school that is built from both being part of the school's charitable trust. The new Headteacher has worked very hard to balance maintaining an excellent, safe and stimulating Montessori environment whilst preserving the best a traditional village school can offer.

Staffing:

The school is particularly well led and the new Headteacher (formerly the Deputy Head) has genuine pride in the school and pupils' attainments. The staff work well as a strong and supportive team. There is a busy and friendly atmosphere at the school and all staff act as positive role models. Teachers have a good knowledge of the Montessori approach and are very well supported by highly committed teaching assistants. The school works confidently for the well-being of every child.

The staff are supported in their work by appropriate written documentation, which is in line with the requirements of the local authority. Some policy documents are under review following the appointment of the new Headteacher.

There is a well qualified staff, some of whom have benefitted from Montessori training. As the school develops it will be prudent to consider how ongoing commitment to the Montessori approach could be supported by continued professional development in Montessori practice.

All staff at Stebbing Primary School provide a rich and stimulating learning environment which is underpinned by sound understanding of the Montessori ethos.

Name of Assessor: Carolyn McNeill

Date of report 17/11/10