



# **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 Sunflower Montessori Nursery School**

Causeway Farm, Middleton, Saxmundham, Suffolk IP17 3NH

Dates of the accreditation visits:

Visit 1: 13 December 2011

Visit 2: 27 April 2012

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

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

The Sunflower Montessori Nursery School is privately owned and is situated on a farm in a rural area. The accommodation consists of one large classroom with an adjacent cloakroom/toilet area. Staff have access to a large kitchen. Outside, there is a secure hard-standing space for the children, a large barn and two covered play areas.

The school is registered for 28 children aged 2 to 5 years. There are currently 51 children on roll. Children may attend for morning or afternoon sessions or for the full day. The parents provide packed lunches. The morning sessions run from 8.45 to 11.45 and afternoon sessions from 12.15 to 15.15. The school opens five days a week, term time only.

The setting supports children with special education needs and English as a second language.

There are seven members of staff. Two hold a Montessori Early Years diploma (pre-primary), and Early Years Professional Status (EYPS). One holds the Montessori pre-primary and primary diplomas. Other staff qualifications include Norton and Cache Level 3 certificates. Two others are currently undertaking training in early years, including one member working towards a Montessori diploma.



## Summary and conclusion

The Sunflower Montessori Nursery School provides care and education in line with Montessori practices and philosophy. This setting is well managed by the head teacher. The team is enthusiastic, committed and works in close partnership with the parents, children and other agencies, giving the nursery school a friendly feeling of being a large family. Independence, freedom, trust and respect are key to this setting's philosophy. The children display high levels of confidence and concentration, and the prepared environments both in and outdoors support their individual learning and 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:***

- Ensure that all observations are evaluated and next steps of learning are followed through.
- Provide training in observation methods for the whole team.
- Introduce peer observation.

### **Philosophy:**

There is good evidence of Montessori practice in this setting. This is due to strong leadership, a well-prepared environment and the staff's continued professional development. The three hour work cycle provides the children with plenty of opportunities to fully explore the environment, indoors and outdoors, and follow their own path of development. The adults trust the children to access learning independently in both environments. Support and re-assurance is offered when needed. The children display high levels of positive self-esteem, independence and confidence.

Children's interests and parents' views are acknowledged and respected. This close partnership ensures that each child is given the opportunity to fulfill their unique potential. Vertical grouping is in place and works well. Children from the age of two and a half to under five years work and play in harmony.

The adults have a good knowledge of Montessori practice and philosophy, and this is reflected in the daily practice. They are very supportive of each other, the children and parents.

### **Learning and Development:**

Sunflower Montessori offers a curriculum in line with the Montessori approach and with the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). The favourable environment reflects the six areas of learning in accordance with Montessori practice. There are sufficient resources, both indoors and outdoors, for the number of children attending. Activities are accessible to the children at all times. The three hour work cycle supports children's independent learning and promotes good levels of concentration. On the day of the visits a good balance between adult- and child-led activities were observed. Further consideration should be given to activities provided in the language



area to take into account the stage of development of children under the age of three years.

Each child has a record of progress, "The Montessori Individual Learning Plan"; this document maps the child's development through the Montessori materials. It specifies when materials are introduced and re-visited. It is effective as it is updated regularly, understood by all the team and shared with parents. Termly themes are planned for by the team.

The key person system works well as the team is aware of the need to plan for each individual child, assess learning and identify next steps. Although some progress has been made since the first accreditation visit in relation to observation and the following through of the next steps of learning, further consideration should be given to these areas.

To ensure that a common understanding emerges amongst the team it is recommended that training on observation methods is made available to all. Training would ensure that all those working with the children understand the value of effective assessment of what is observed and the importance of using this for planning, recording and action on the next steps of learning identified.

Vertical grouping is in place. All children attending work in co-operation with one another and there is a high degree of respect amongst them. Extracurricular activities such as ballet and massage are offered outside of the work cycle period, though they were not observed on the days of the visits.

The learning outcomes for the children attending Sunflower Montessori are good due to the well-prepared environments, trust placed in the child, enthusiastic staff and partnership with parents.

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

The environment at Sunflower Montessori is prepared in line with Montessori practice and the EYFS. It is divided into six areas of learning and contains a wide range of Montessori apparatus and other early years' materials. These are well displayed and accessible to the children at all times. The children explore both the indoor and outdoor environments with joy. They are given opportunities to work/play alone, in pairs and small groups. The adults are well placed to provide support when this is needed.

The children are able to access learning opportunities independently and display high levels of independence and confidence. The cycle of activity is encouraged both indoors and outdoors; this is good practice as it provides consistency of approach for the child. Snack and water is available throughout the sessions. The children relish the opportunity to eat and drink whenever they feel the need to do so. The large outdoor area is well planned and provides plenty of opportunities for development in all the six areas of learning. The children access this area freely at all times.

The resources, both indoors and outdoors, are arranged effectively and are sufficient for the number of children attending. The pupils are partners in the upkeep of the environment as they are encouraged to look after the snack area, the plants and the materials.



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

Independence, freedom, trust and respect are key to this setting's philosophy. The staff show high regard for each other, parents, visitors and children. They are good role models.

Opportunities for independent learning, both indoors and outdoors, are available throughout the sessions. This is facilitated by the three hour work cycle. The classroom, large barn and outdoors areas are effectively used, as the children move freely from one to another. A high degree of respect amongst the children is evident as they help each other, complete their cycles of activity, share well and take turns.

Partnership with parents is strong. Those interviewed feel valued and part of this Montessori community. Information on Montessori practice and philosophy is given to the parents when they attend with their child prior to them joining the nursery, during information evenings and in the prospectus. Following the recommendation from the first visit the setting now offers parents access to Montessori literature and makes reference to relevant websites on the documentation sent home. This practice, once embedded, will provide the parents with further insight into the care and education offered at this setting and information on how to facilitate independence at home.

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

The classroom and outdoor areas are well managed by the team. The head has a clear vision for the setting and communicates it effectively to all stakeholders; children, staff and parents. There are a number of policies and procedures in place. The staff understand and act on them. This ensures that children are kept safe at all times.

The adults prepare stimulating environments for the children and trust them to access those environments freely and independently. The three hour work cycle provides endless opportunities for continued learning. The children benefit from this excellent practice as they make good progress in all areas of the curriculum.

During the visits there was a good balance between adult-initiated and child-led activities. This ensures good progression through the Montessori materials and the EYFS. Vertical grouping works well at this setting; there is a high degree of respect and co-operation amongst the children. Extracurricular activities such as ballet and massage are offered but none took place on the days of the visits. Practice has been further enhanced since the first accreditation visit, as newly introduced activities placed on the shelves are now evaluated.

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

Strong links with parents are evident. The head and her team values this partnership and endeavour to involve them in the school's life. Parents are welcome to participate during outings, festivals and planting sessions. The parents interviewed praised the team highly for the care and education provided for their children. The open door policy, daily access to the staff and termly meetings with the head gives them a good insight into this establishment's practice.

The key person system is in place but staff interact with all children and contribute to their



learning and development. The parents are aware of their child's key person and are able to form strong links with them. The key person has the responsibility for updating the child's Learning Journey. This document is shared with parents termly by the head. The head will invite the key person to be part of the process when the next round of meetings takes place.

**Staffing:**

This setting is effectively managed by the head. The team members understand their roles and responsibilities in relation to the environment, children's learning and development, partnership with parents and continued professional development. An effective staff structure is in place. Photographs and roles are displayed for the parents and children.

Continued professional development is encouraged by in-house training, attendance at Montessori conferences and through an effective mentoring system of Montessori qualified staff to non-Montessori qualified members of the team. This creates a positive and effective learning environment and cohesiveness of practice. To further enhance this good practice peer observation should be introduced, evaluated and findings used to map individual's continued professional development.

Job descriptions are in place and suitable for the roles performed. Staff are formally appraised annually and their views are taken into consideration. Informal appraisals are carried out often as the head observes practice and shares findings with her team. Staff meetings take place every five to six weeks. This is effective use of time during which staff discuss children's progress, continued professional development, classroom procedures, current issues and implementation of activities relating to termly themes. These discussions are recorded.

There are seven members of staff. Two hold a Montessori Early Years diploma (pre-primary), and have also achieved EYPS, and one holds a Montessori pre-primary and primary diplomas. Other staff hold a Norton nanny qualification and Cache Level 3 and two are currently undertaking training: Level 3 apprentice and the Montessori diploma qualifications.

The team at Sunflower Montessori is committed to the delivery of high quality care and education, in line with the Montessori philosophy. Their enthusiasm for the method is reflected in their daily practices.

Name of Assessor: Rosie Roberts

Date of report: 3<sup>rd</sup> of May 2012

First visit – 13<sup>th</sup> of December 2011

Second visit – 27<sup>th</sup> of April 2012