

# 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.

### **The Montessori Early Years Department at The Elms School**

Cowall, Malvern, Worcs. WR13 6EF

Visited on 8 October 2009

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

The Elms School first opened in 1614. The Montessori early years department for 3 to 6 year olds was established in September 2008. The school is located in the village of Cowall, near Malvern. The setting has 60 acres of grounds including a farm, tennis court, paddocks and a 'jungle'. The early years occupies a large open plan classroom adjacent to the main school buildings. The children have access to a dining room, toilet facilities, a safe and secure outside area and supervised access to the grounds.

The Elms School is an independent preparatory school. It is registered with the Independent School's Inspectorate. A maximum of 36 children from 3 to 6 years of age attend the early years department at any one time. There are 19 children on roll. The school is open from Mondays to Fridays from 8.15am to 3.45 pm term time only. An after school club is available.

Four members of staff work directly with the children. They hold the following qualifications: BA (Hons), Early Years Professional Status (B.Ed), Montessori Diploma and Certificates.

*Schools please note: the assessor's recommendations are considered by the Report Monitoring Group which meets two/three times each term and are presented for validation to the Montessori Evaluation and Accreditation Board. The report is published following the MEAB validation and is private and confidential until such time.*

#### **Summary and conclusion.**

The early years department at The Elms School offers a curriculum which follows the Montessori practice, the Early Years Foundation Stage and the National Strategies. The Montessori philosophy and practice is embedded in the daily practice. Independence and freedom to explore the favourable environment are key to the children's learning and development. The roles and responsibilities of adults are clearly defined in writing, and understood by all. The wide range of Montessori materials is well displayed, cared for and

suitable for the ages and stages of children's development. Planning, learning, assessment and recording of children's progress is exemplary. There is a good level of partnership with parents and other agencies. The outcomes for the children attending the Montessori early years department of the Elms School are very positive.

*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 further development is needed in the following areas:*

- Make art materials accessible at all times both indoors and outdoors
- Provide a wide range of resources in the outdoor classroom with relevant planning and assessment.

### **Philosophy:**

The early years department at The Elms School are committed to offering children care and education in line with the Montessori practice and philosophy, the Early Years Foundation Stage and the requirements of the National Curriculum for the older children. The staff respects the uniqueness of each child and aim to provide each one of them with opportunities to follow their own developmental path. This is achieved through good partnership with parents and other agencies, freedom to explore a well-prepared environment, an individualized curriculum and supportive and qualified adults who understand their roles and responsibilities.

The extended work-cycle ensures that there are plenty of opportunities for the children to work/play individually, in pairs or in small groups. They relish the freedom, and this was expressed by a number of them during informal chats with the assessor. The children purposefully and enthusiastically explore the wide range of Montessori materials available in the classroom and, with very few reminders, follow the cycle of activity. There is a high level of co-operation between the members of the group. This is due to the care and attention paid by the staff to the children's personal, social, and emotional development and vertical grouping.

There are written policies and procedures in place to safeguard the children and to ensure that the aims and objectives of the school are understood and followed by those involved with the setting.

Assessment – very good

### **Learning and Development:**

The curriculum delivered at the early years department of The Elms School follows Montessori practice and is closely linked to the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) and the National Curriculum. The six areas of learning are effectively covered by the range of Montessori materials readily available, comprehensive planning/assessment/recording, and individual support given to the children by staff who understand their roles and responsibilities in relation to children's learning.

Record keeping is exemplary. Children's achievements are recorded daily and shared with parents via termly reports or more often should a meeting be requested. The keep track system is used to record the nursery and reception children's progress. This works well as it covers all areas of learning in accordance with Montessori practice and the requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage. Year one progress is recorded in a 'progress book'. Information

gathered is used to inform reports and in discussions with parents.

The key person system is in place; however, all adults participate in the children's learning. Weekly staff meetings allow the team to share information about the children's progress, to celebrate successes and to identify further areas of development. There is evidence of curriculum differentiation as the department caters for children of different ages and abilities.

The learning resources are plentiful, well kept, sufficient for the number of children, and displayed in accordance with Montessori practice. A high level of independence, confidence and self-esteem is evident in the children. The extended work cycle provides plenty of opportunities for spontaneous learning as the children engage effectively with the favourable environment. Vertical grouping works well at this setting as great care is taken by the adults in the preparation of the classroom and in the individual learning and assessment of each child.

Parents are considered partners in their child's education and their views are respected.

The good range of learning resources, partnership with parents and other agencies and staff knowledge of the curriculum ensure that the outcomes are positive for the children attending the early years department at The Elms School.

Assessment: very good

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

The indoor environment of the early years department at The Elms School is meticulously prepared. The Montessori learning resources are inviting, well kept, accessible to the children and relevant to their age and stage of development. The children, freely and enthusiastically, explore the large open plan classroom either by themselves, in pairs or small groups. There is a wealth of opportunities for autonomous learning. Experienced and qualified staff observe children regularly and scaffold their learning effectively.

There is free flow between the indoor and outdoor classroom. Children freely explore the Montessori materials in both environments. However, careful consideration should be given by the team to how the outdoor area, adjacent to the classroom, could be further developed to provide the children with opportunities to work/play with a wider range of learning materials. These activities should be designed specially for outdoors use and, if possible, should be stored outside to offer regular access and support free choice at all times. This would enhance children's learning and enrich their experiences. It is recommended that a selection of appropriate art resources be readily available in the classroom and outdoors to further promote spontaneous creativity.

Lunch is taken in a lovely dining room and shared with teachers and older children. A good level of interaction between the age groups and adults was observed. The whole setting has a calm and relaxed feel to it. The children are acknowledged at every step by the support team; cleaners, cooks, handyman, gardeners, etc. To further strengthen the links between the early years department and the rest of the school 'paired' reading with children from year two is promoted and teaching staff from other classrooms are invited to share science experiments with the group. This is good practice as it promotes a sense of belonging and cohesiveness.

The beautiful grounds surrounding the school are used for 'woodland challenges' as well as for games and promote the development of gross motor skills. The children are well supervised

during these activities.

Assessment: satisfactory

### **Montessori practice: Independence**

The school promotes freedom and independence through a well-prepared environment and an extended work-cycle. The adults trust the child's ability to direct their learning and are experts in following the child's natural development. The nature of the child is carefully considered and steps taken to ensure that they are free to work in different environments, alone, in pairs or small groups as well as with a chosen adult. The children move freely between the indoors and outdoors. A good and sensitive level of adult support is offered in both environments.

The snack area is inviting with a good choice of fruit and biscuits. The children choose sensibly and remind each other of the need to be mindful of waste. Food and drink is available throughout the day and the children choose when to have it and with whom. This area provides them with opportunities for socialization, conflict resolution and fun as they enjoy preparing the snack and washing up.

The children show great respect for each other, the adults and the environment. A high degree of co-operation amongst the children was evident on the day of the visit. Children spontaneously offer to help each other, explain the rules to those who momentarily forget them, leave unattended work alone and complete the cycle of activity with very few reminders.

The Montessori practice and philosophy was introduced in the early years department in September 2008. The head and her team actively promote the benefits of this method through curriculum evenings, informal chats at the door, and literature in the entrance hall. The parents interviewed are satisfied with the children's learning and special comments were made about their child's ability to interact with the environment in a more purposeful way, during walks or at home.

Assessment: Very good

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

The head has clear expectations of her team in relation to classroom management and preparation. This is evident in the pride they take in providing the children with a favourable environment in which they can access learning independently with the right level of adult support. All the staff work well as a team.

The large classroom and the outdoors are well managed by the adults. They are aware of child/staff ratios and adjust their position accordingly. Learning and assessment is managed effectively through observations, discussions of children's progress during staff meetings and daily update of record cards. They know the children well and cater for their developmental needs. Presentations are done in line with Montessori practice. The children's learning would be further enhanced if sustained shared thinking were systematically linked to presentations. There is a good balance between child- and adult-led activities. Vertical grouping is in place. Extra curricular activities take place in the afternoon and do not interrupt the extended work-cycle.

ASSESSMENT: VERY GOOD

### **Montessori Practice: links with parents**

Partnership with parents is good. Those interviewed were delighted with their child's development, impressed by the support given to each individual child and welcome the 'open door' policy. Curriculum evenings, newsletters, photos in the entrance hall and informal chats at the beginning and end of the day ensure that parents are kept up to date with the school's activities and children's learning and development.

The record system in place is effective as it is updated daily and used to produce accurate termly reports. The Montessori 'lists' act as learning intentions for the term. This is regularly updated and modified according to the children's progress. Tasks accomplished, as well as observations, are entered daily in the computerized system, and linked to the learning goals as specified in the Early Years Foundation Stage. A 'progress book' is used to record the older children's achievements as their learning is outside the scope of the keep track system. This is effective and covers all areas of learning in accordance with Montessori practice.

The adults have a clear understanding of the requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage, Montessori practice and the National Strategies. This was clearly established during staff interviews. Their role as a key person is well defined and understood by them and the parents.

Children's safety and well-being are carefully monitored without curtailing their freedom.

Assessment: very good

### **Staffing:**

Four adults work directly with the children. The head holds the relevant Montessori qualification, B.A.Hons and EYPS. The other members of her team are also qualified Montessori practitioners. Personal professional development is actively encouraged. Teamwork is strong and team members show respect for each other.

Formal staff meetings take place once a week and are well documented. As this is a very small team there are opportunities for daily and informal discussions about children's development, the favourable environment, and information received from parents. Peer observation is on the planning and development agenda and will be implemented in the Spring term. The Montessori early years department was only created in September 2008, so staff appraisals are yet to take place. According to the head this will happen yearly and will reflect further training. The staff handbook, given to new members, sets clear guidelines of the setting's expectations.

The early years staff at The Elms School are committed to deliver a high standard of care and education in line with Montessori practice, the Early Years Foundation Stage and the National Strategies.

ASSESSMENT: VERY GOOD