

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.

Weyhill Montessori School

Scout Headquarters, Youth Campus, Weyhill, Haslemere, Surrey GU27 1BX

Date of accreditation visit: 21 May 2010

This accreditation report relates to children between the ages of 2½ and 5 years

Description of the school

Weyhill Montessori School is a privately owned school which opened in 1995 and is managed by the proprietor. It is situated close to the centre of Haslemere in a single storey building which is the Scout Headquarters. It comprises a large classroom with doors leading to the kitchen and garden, and has an entrance hallway from which a secondary hall and bathroom facilities are accessed.

The fenced garden consisting of a large L-shaped paved and grassed area includes an activity centre with a climbing wall, slide, sand-pit, picnic tables, stepping stones, plant beds, planters and a digging area. An awning provides for maximum shade and weather cover.

The school is open from 9.30 to 3.00 on Mondays and Thursdays, 9.30-12.30 on Tuesdays and Fridays, and 9.30 to 2.30 on Wednesdays for 37 weeks of the year.

The school is registered for 26 children up to the age of five years and has 47 currently on roll. Children attend from the local and surrounding area. The school supports children with special needs and children who speak English as an additional language (EAL). The school employs seven staff; of these, five hold full Montessori teaching qualifications and another holds a TEFL teaching qualification.

Summary and conclusion.

Weyhill Montessori is a professionally led and well managed school. It offers a genuine Montessori environment where children’s freedom of choice and independence are paramount. Key principles of vertical grouping and a three hour work cycle are effectively implemented. Staff are Montessori qualified, experienced and committed to continuous professional development and reflective practice for the benefit of the children. The self-

evaluation process is outstanding. High standards are achieved in all aspects of the environment through excellent team work and a profound commitment to Montessori best practice. The quality of staff interactions with children is high, supporting children in all areas of their learning and development. The partnership with parents is robust. The educational aims of the school are clearly set out in the materials provided for parents. An extensive range of developmentally appropriate resources are easily accessible to all children. Planning is meticulous in all areas of the school.

- ***The school provides an education in accordance with the principles of the Montessori approach and environment and merits accreditation by the Montessori Evaluation and Accreditation Board***

Philosophy

The implementation of the Montessori philosophy is outstanding. It is embedded in practice through the dedication of staff in observing the children and using these observations to support the child's individual learning and interest. This is a warm and welcoming school where children are happy, eager to learn and show great curiosity. The aims of the school take full account of the nature of the child, the needs of the family, the importance of a carefully prepared and high quality learning environment and the role of the adult within it. The three hour work cycle maximizes opportunities for the children to act independently, enabling them to make decisions and choices and benefit from a vertical age grouping.

Information for parents is excellent and they are provided with clear guidance and understand the high level of Montessori education on offer. Staff respect parents' leading role as their child's first educators and they regularly review principles, goals and philosophy thus ensuring best practice. Written details of all classroom procedures are indicative of the meticulous organization and planning. Free flow access is provided to the outdoor area and the 'inner need' of the child is consistently followed encouraging independence and confidence. Staff support children in all areas of their learning and development through astute observation, guidance, reassurance and recording. The caring social interactions of the children, the purposeful activity, and the relaxed atmosphere distinguish this school as being an outstanding Montessori setting.

Learning and Development

The provision for learning and development is highly effective, well organized and efficiently managed providing good outcomes for each child. Children are free to explore the environment at their own pace and each child has a key person to plan individual and group activities on a weekly basis. Assessment and recording is done by the key person for the individual child. Relationships between adults and children are excellent. All children have access to suitable resources, to their Key Person, a mixed age group in one large classroom and regular outdoor activities.

All staff contribute at the daily team meetings. The planning process is well documented across the long, medium and short term timescales and flexibility is built in to ensure key persons respond to changing interests in the child's life and adjust the curriculum accordingly. The continuous learning provision in the Montessori environment is an integral part of their educational plans. The process of assessment and recording of children's progress is thorough.

Effective team work in planning and record-keeping ensures children's needs are met. Key persons provide activities and personal targets for each child which are updated daily, and are reviewed half-termly. They are shared with parents whose comments are fed into the recording/assessing cycle. Effective links are made with the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) aspects of learning and development in assessment, recording and planning. Topic planning enriches the provision, broadening children's experience and perception of the world beyond the classroom. Established systems of planning, recording and assessment ensure that the setting can effectively meet its objective to provide for the individual needs of all children who attend, including those with special needs and English as an additional language. The experienced special educational needs coordinator (SENCO) has good links with outside agencies and attends termly SEN training workshops.

Prepared Environment: resources and materials

An excellent range of carefully maintained Montessori resources are set out in order around the classroom to reflect the learning requirements of the children attending. Both the indoor and outdoor resources are easily accessible to the children and support all aspects of a child's development. Montessori materials are ample in quantity and quality, complete, clean, systematically arranged and ready for use. The layout ensures that children have ample space in adjacent areas in which to use them and they are successfully encouraged to participate in their upkeep.

Highly effective use is made of all the accommodation. Indoor resources are taken outdoors, for example, the parachute, washing activities and role play. Outdoor activities provide excellent opportunities for inquisitiveness, investigation and observation. Staff provide a warm and welcoming environment, with displays of children's work in the entrance hall and on the walls. They understand their role as custodians of the environment and in supporting learning and development. The quality of the adult to child interactions is particularly high and enhances the personal, social and emotional development of the children as well as communication and language skills.

Montessori practice: independence:

Independence is successfully promoted and children have free flow of movement both indoors and outdoors throughout the three hour work cycle. Parents receive written and verbal information on how to promote independence and on how this can be extended to their home environment. A well-resourced parent library, information sheets, a web site and an annual parent talk include advice on fostering independence. Parents are invited to participate in themes on continents to support the children's exploration of the world.

During the work cycle the children choose their own activities independently and decide when to have a snack. Children are trusted to access learning spontaneously, individually or in small groups. They maximize the opportunity for children to make decisions for themselves, make mistakes without fear of consequence and have the time to complete cycles of activity. Key persons observe where children are going and actively encourage exploration of all areas through their individual presentations.

The staff model good behaviour for the children, speaking softly and with respect for each other and for the children. Interactions between children and staff are positive and respectful.

Children show due regard for the right of their peers to work undisturbed, and levels of concentration are very good. Interaction between children is encouraged and facilitated by asking an older child to help a younger one, through a classroom helper who has 'special' responsibilities for that day.

Montessori practice: classroom management:

The classroom is well managed through a combination of planning and spontaneous learning by the children in response to their interests both indoors and outdoors. The morning session has a three hour work cycle which starts at 9.30 a.m. and includes effective free flow access to the garden.

The single classroom lends itself well to vertical grouping. Adults are evenly distributed throughout the setting with well organized written routines to ensure good supervision of children. Activities are primarily child initiated and children maintain cycles of activity throughout the uninterrupted work cycle, and are secure in asking for assistance. Staff offer appropriate support and encouragement to the children whilst encouraging them to be independent. The older children have free access to a snack table and the two year olds have snack together to receive support with sitting down to eat and drink and learn how to be together to share food. At lunchtime children wait until everyone at their table is present before starting their packed lunches.

French is the only scheduled additional activity which takes place, and it incorporates songs, stories and games blended into the daily routine and children are at liberty to choose alternatives. Other activities such as outings and visitors coming to the setting are arranged periodically. The exceptionally good team work contributes to the seamless serenity of this happy learning environment.

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

The environment is maintained to high standards. This is achieved through effective systems and good team work. Clear policies and procedures are well-known to staff and parents. The child's learning journey record system is comprehensive and informative in all areas of learning in the EYFS and in parallel with the Montessori curriculum. Well-established observation practices ensure that self-reflection is an intrinsic part of daily life and supports continuous improvement.

A strong partnership with all parents is established and frequent reviews ensure best practice. The key person arrangements ensure that individual children are well catered for and parents have a direct link with a member of staff who knows their child well. Written reports are given to parents and they are very positive about the feedback from staff and the two parent-teacher meetings each year. Good opportunities are provided for parental involvement in the school and they feel well informed regarding Montessori methods and classroom practice. Parents are supportive and have a very high regard for the school. The manager liaises with parents of children with SEN and EAL and attends meetings with outside agencies to support families. A termly newsletter is distributed to parents and they are invited to share artefacts, skills and experience relating to themes. Good links are maintained with local schools and a parent association for self-help, support and fund-raising holds events throughout the year. Feedback from parental and child questionnaires are used effectively for self-evaluation purposes.

Staffing:

The leadership, management and teamwork are all robust. The staffing structure supports flexible team working to provide a smoothly managed environment. The staff team is skilled and cohesive, with clear objectives in carrying out duties. Best practice is cascaded at regular meetings through continuous professional development. Every member of the team contributes ideas regarding daily practice and planning is a shared function. A thorough, formal induction system and good training opportunities are available to ensure skills remain current. A commitment to annual and on-going self-appraisal is part of their high quality reflective practice.

Staff are fully qualified and experienced Montessori practitioners. Their shared sense of purpose is a profound commitment to Montessori best practice which is evidenced in their enthusiasm. They implement the Montessori approach effectively which enhances children's learning. Meticulous attention to detail is evidenced in all aspects of daily routines. Every member of daily staff holds a current first aid certificate and has attended Child Protection training. An annual review of developments is made available to staff and parents and ample new materials complement the Montessori approach to learning.

Name of Assessor: Anne McConway

Date of report: 22 May 2010