



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) and subsequent 2012 revisions. 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.

Willow Park Montessori Day Nursery

316 Tuddenham Road, Ipswich, Suffolk IP4 3QJ

Dates of the accreditation visits:

Visit 1: November 10th 2011

Visit 2: May 30th 2012

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

Description of the school

Willow Park Montessori Day Nursery was registered in 2002. The nursery is situated on the north-eastern outskirts of Ipswich in Suffolk. It operates from a modular building with three indoor classrooms and one outdoor classroom. The outside has gardening, patio, large bark and undercover areas. The nursery serves the local community and surrounding area.

The nursery opens Monday to Friday all year round from 08:00 to 18:00. Children are able to attend for a variety of sessions. A maximum of 54 children may attend the nursery at any one time. Willow Park Montessori Nursery follows the child in their three nursery rooms, Ladybirds for the under twos, Hedgehogs for the 2 to 3 year olds and Owls for the 3 to 5 year olds. There are currently 116 children on roll who are all within the Early Years Foundation Stage. They provide funded early education for three and four year olds. The nursery supports children with special educational needs and/or disabilities and children who speak English as an additional language, or are bilingual.

The nursery employs 26 members of staff, 23 of whom work directly with the children. Seven of the staff hold appropriate Montessori qualifications and the majority of the staff hold other appropriate early years qualifications at Level 3 or above. The nursery uses the Montessori approach to education alongside the Early Years Foundation Stage. They receive support from the Local Authority and have achieved the Suffolk Quality Assurance Scheme.



Summary and conclusion

Willow Park Montessori Nursery provides an excellent learning environment for children from 3 months to 5 years old. It is efficiently organized and administered by the owner and a well qualified management team. The nursery is situated in the grounds of a sports centre located on the outskirts of Ipswich. The nursery is beautifully furnished with a very broad range of Montessori materials supplemented by other appropriate equipment to extend the child in all the areas of learning. This combination provides a most appropriate learning environment.

The children in the nursery are independent, happy and thoroughly enjoy their time in the nursery. Willow Park has completely embraced the outdoor environment and has natural free flow throughout the day with dedicated staff based in the outdoor classrooms. They supervise and plan the wealth of appropriate resources using the Montessori areas of learning and the EYFS curriculum as their guide.

The parents of the nursery appreciate the excellent lines of communication that are available to them not only in relation to administration but also through Montessori information evenings. This is further enhanced by daily liaison between the room staff and the parents/carers.

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 ensure the peer observation already started becomes an embedded part of staff development.

Philosophy:

Willow Park Montessori Nursery is a setting which is guided by the Montessori philosophy, aiming to inspire the development of individual children in a safe and supportive environment. The staff are well versed in this philosophy, even those members who do not hold a Montessori qualification. The management team have ensured that these staff members have benefitted from frequent in-house Montessori training sessions. The children are all independent and have the freedom within the environment to carry out their exercises. Each child is treated as a unique individual with his or her own specific needs; these are developed to ensure that the child has the opportunity to work towards filling his or her potential.

There are many opportunities throughout the nursery for children to develop their own learning style using the freedom within the structured environment and their own self-discipline. Adults support their needs to extend their learning opportunities effectively. They stand back or help as and when appropriate, they encourage independence in every child from the moment they enter the nursery and are always ready to extend a child's knowledge in all the areas of learning. There were many times when the children in the outdoor classroom had opportunities to extend their interests and knowledge. One example was a child working with a pulley and a bucket, experimenting with different fir cones and leaves, and feeling the differences in the weight when hauling on the rope. The child then shared his observations with the other



children around him who wanted to have a go.

Learning and Development:

Each classroom has the Montessori areas of learning clearly defined. There are extra activities in each of the areas to extend their knowledge; for example, there are extra activities in the language area to help the child use rhyming words in preparation for reading. Free flow operates between the inside and outside for the 2 to 5 year olds during the morning work cycle. Dedicated staff manage and support the outdoor environment, where carefully planned activities are available in all areas of learning.

The babies all have a wide choice of toys and activities to enable them to have social and creative experiences. The levels of independence encouraged by the caring staff helps the children achieve success in everything they attempt, such as selecting their snack, eating with very little help and then clearing the table and washing up their plates.

All areas of the classrooms are in constant use and are available to every child. The work cycle is three hours in the mornings and two and a half hours in the afternoons. Within these periods the children are focused and engaged in spontaneously selected activities. They also participate in adult-led activities such as singing. During the visit children were observed making choices of which song they wanted to sing by selecting pictures which represented the songs and rhymes (such a 'ten fat sausages') before asking the teacher to come and join them and lead the singing.

Meticulous weekly planning ensures that children's developmental needs are constantly met. Assessment of the children is unobtrusive and based on regular observations recorded in each child's learning story. The key persons plan to ensure that each child has all the necessary opportunities to develop their learning at their own pace.

Since the first visit there has been a change in the staff structure in Owls and the team is performing in total harmony producing a calm, busy working environment within the work cycle in both the morning and afternoon.

Prepared Environment: resources and materials

All classrooms including the outdoor one provide a carefully prepared environment, rich in learning opportunities and appropriate for the age group of the children. The materials are organized neatly on the shelves moving from easier exercises to more difficult ones in each area of learning. There is an excellent range of materials, all of which are in very good working order, and appealing and attractive for the children. There is a sufficient variety of resources to ensure children have good access to learning in all areas. All materials in each room are appropriate for the children to support their individual developmental needs.

The activities available to children are carefully prepared and considered, such as a basket with a 'heavy log', a mat and five home-made felt frogs. These props support spontaneous choice and give children opportunities to initiate singing, as was demonstrated during the first visit when the assessor was encouraged to join with the singing and appropriately scolded when she



got the words in the wrong order!

The Ladybird class places a great emphasis on larger equipment in the room to assist the babies gross motor skills. On one side of the room, there is a substantial structure with steps and a small banister, then a platform with a carpeted incline back to floor level. This was in constant use and the children were totally independent whilst developing their muscular movement and balance.

The outdoor area has a range of activities with relevant resources, such as cutting and sticking using bird and wildlife magazines. There are activities to suit all ages of children. The staff encourage the children to access the appropriate materials and this ensures that every child works toward his or her full potential.

As the second visit coincided with the Diamond Jubilee celebrations it was good to see some very captivating exercises, some independent and some teacher-led, interesting the children in the royal family and the important landmarks in London. These activities described as planned experiences certainly extended the vocabulary of the children.

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

Every child in this nursery is thoroughly independent. Children in the baby unit are selecting their cereal for breakfast, helping to put their bibs on and using small jugs when pouring milk on to their cereal and into their beakers. Rolling snack takes place across the whole nursery and each child visits the table when they feel they need to eat something or have a drink. They find their own little box, take a plate and a glass, eat their snack and then wash and dry up the utensils used. They endeavour to get dressed themselves to go outside and undress when they come in. They choose their activities independently throughout the work cycle, decide when they would like to use the outdoor classroom, and know the routine. The outdoor classroom offers enormous choice and encourages the children to be independent as they select their activities.

The staff carefully monitor the children's choice of exercises but very rarely have to intervene. During the visit, there were many examples of respect and offers of help from one child to another. The children also respect the environment and the staff within it. All children have freedom within the prepared environment to move around from one area to another, to choose what they would like to do and to repeat certain activities, satisfying the child's inner need for repetition.

Parents are actively encouraged to carry on the fostering of independence at home as the staff constantly feed back to the parents any milestones in their child's independence through the "wow board" which each class has just outside their rooms. If a child has achieved something out of the usual either at school or at home, the staff or parent writes a large sticky note and places it on the board recording the triumph. The staff give a verbal daily feedback. Equally the parents communicate any independent progress that has happened at home. Parents are well prepared by regular nursery communications such as newsletters and Montessori evenings which ensure home and school offer a consistent approach to discipline, independence and day to day routines.



Montessori practice: classroom management

The planning system that operates throughout the nursery is impressive, as each new week is considered during a Friday's planning meeting. During the week, each staff member makes notes of children's interests on special wall charts of particular areas of learning. These notes are then collated by the room supervisors ready for the planning meeting and then the next week's plan is produced. When planning, the staff ensure that what the children have initiated links appropriately with the relevant areas of learning.

Children have their individual key worker who ensures that their child's learning stories are completed regularly, adding not only their own observations but those of other staff members. These stories are an accurate and attractive record of their time at nursery. They also liaise with the parents on a daily basis. Each key person ensures that children's suggestions are implemented and integrated into the activities on offer during their specific days of attendance.

The oldest class is vertically grouped with 3 to 5 year olds. The baby's class is for 3 months to 2 years and Hedgehogs are from 2 to 3 years old. The work cycle extends to three hours in the morning sessions and two and a half hours in the afternoon in the two older classes, and the babies are working towards shorter work cycles taking into account their specific needs.

Outdoor planning operates on a similar basis with dedicated staff ensuring the same meticulous planning and attention to detail found in the indoor classroom. The outside environment is a unique feature of this nursery with all areas of the Montessori philosophy and the EYFS strands being encompassed. All the adults are well aware of their responsibilities and roles within their own classroom and each class has comprehensive written routines on the walls, such as responsibilities for room preparation, ensuring that the Montessori environment is always complete for the children. The room leaders all organize their teams effectively to ensure that the individual strengths of each member are recognized and utilized to both the children and fellow teacher's advantages. There is a good mix of child-initiated and adult-led activities in all rooms.

Montessori Practice: links with parents, including reports and records

The adult's responsibilities are equally shared out and supervised by the room leaders. Everyone knows their responsibilities and they can always refer to the wall charts to clarify any duties. Every child has a key person who is responsible for direct liaison with their child's parents or carers. They are responsible for ensuring that adequate observations are made of each child, not necessarily by them, and for the completion of their child's learning story. Liaison with parents is first class, with very happy parents, as they are kept well informed of their child's progress. Parents have the opportunity to attend specific Montessori evenings where different aspects of the philosophy and practice are discussed.

The calm and confident approach of the staff in their daily liaising has been found to be particularly beneficial to the parents or carers of the very young children, especially in their first weeks of being away from their families. During the second visit there was a little boy on the second day of his three days induction, and this process was totally child-orientated and much appreciated by the parent as it made this first separation an easy transition from home to



nursery. This three day practice is in place as the child moves through the nursery from class to class.

Parents receive half termly newsletters and communications are sent out regularly by e-mail. They have the opportunity to attend the nursery in the Summer term for a celebratory evening of the children's work. In Owls, termly reports are sent out to parents and the learning stories are sent home termly and at any other time that the parent requests it.

Staffing:

The nursery benefits from full time cover by two nursery managers, who job share with one overlap day. They work in the classrooms to cover sickness and are both Montessori qualified and carry out all the administration that goes with a busy year-round nursery. They are always available to help the staff with any problems they may have, both school and pastoral. They are made aware of the contents of the weekly meetings and sometimes sit in on these sessions.

Four other staff have appropriate and relevant Montessori training and the rest have recognised childcare qualifications. Three of the qualified staff are employed in Owls and the other member is a floater, so she moves between the classes. The owner of the school and the managers undertake regular Montessori information training sessions which ensure that all staff are well aware of the philosophy. It would be beneficial if a few more staff could actually undertake Montessori training.

There is a comprehensive induction process in place now that the managers are in the office. Regular staff meetings take place, each unit has weekly meetings and all the staff meet together each half term. The whole staff team try to attend the MSA meetings three times a year to keep their Montessori knowledge up to date. They benefit from training days run by Suffolk County Council and the Early Years Partnership.

In Ladybirds and Hedgehogs, the staff all work extremely well together and form a cohesive team. Due to recent staff changes Owls need a little time to bond with the new supervisor and the management need to ensure that appropriate support is given to her according to her needs. The entire staff work well as a complete and cohesive team and present themselves as an impressive committed staff body.

Following recommendations made during the first visit, the owner, managers and staff have worked very hard to introduce and train the staff in peer observation. A peer observation questionnaire was sent to all the staff asking for their views and as a result of this, training has taken place for all the staff. During the second half of this term, the lead practitioners and managers are observing each other and reporting back to the whole staff and in the autumn the other staff are starting to observe each other. The managers have already carried out their own observations on the staff in preparation for their annual appraisals.

The new staff structure was observed in action in Owls during the second visit and it was clear that this change has had a positive effect in the class in all aspects.

Name of Assessor: Wendy Compson



Date of reports:

First visit – November 19th 2011

Second visit – June 2nd 2012