

# 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.

### **Chagford Montessori Nursery School**

Lower Street, Chagford, Newton Abbot, Devon TQ13 8BX

Date of accreditation visit: 15 March 2010

The accreditation report assesses the Montessori practice offered to 2½ to 5 year olds in this setting

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

Chagford Nursery School was registered under this management in July 2007 and is privately owned by the manager and the administrator. Both partners take an active part in the running of the nursery. The school is located in Chagford town on the edge Dartmoor, in Devon, and has sole use of the bungalow it occupies. The property is set back from the road and has two secure enclosed outdoor areas which are accessible to the children and are very well resourced with a wide range of appropriate outdoor equipment and separate gardening areas.

The school is registered on the Early Years register for 20 children under the age of eight. Currently there are 26 registered, attending on different days of the week; 23 are funded three and four year olds. The school currently offers flexible session times between the hours of 8.30am – 5pm Monday to Wednesday, 8.30am – 1pm on Thursday and a toddler group on Friday mornings. A French Club is offered on Wednesday afternoons.

The children go on to local primary schools. The nursery school supports children who have English as an additional language and children with additional needs.

There are at present five members of staff working with the children, two of whom hold the Montessori Foundation Certificate one of whom is currently working towards the Montessori Early Childhood Course, two have International Diplomas and one is a qualified primary school teacher. The setting is supported by the Local Authority.

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

**Chagford Nursery School** is fully committed to Montessori goals and philosophy. The principles of vertical grouping and independent learning are very evident. The excellent classroom management, the well prepared environment, full commitment to free flow to the two garden areas and the good behavior of the children are testament to their understanding of the Montessori Philosophy. The Nursery is very well resourced with a wide range of suitable and age-appropriate Montessori and other materials which are well displayed and accessible and very well maintained. The two outside areas are attractive and stimulating and provide activities which cover all the six area of learning. The nursery has a

very strong partnership with its parents. Planning, recording and observations are extensive and the staff team work is very evident. More evaluations of the observations would enhance their practice further.

***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. It is recommended that to uphold the current high standards the nursery gives consideration to:***

- incorporating written evaluations of observations carried out in the setting.

### **Philosophy:**

The foundation for learning and development of the children at this nursery is due to the adherence to the Montessori philosophy as the staff support the child as an active learner. They also provide a stimulating, well prepared environment and demonstrate confidence in the children by allowing them the freedom to explore, learn and develop at their own rate within clearly defined boundaries. The teachers create opportunities for the children to develop independence and improve their self-care skills. The staff respect the individuality of each child and give them opportunities to follow their own developmental path, achieving this through observation and good partnership with the parents. They are also extremely good role models.

The children work purposefully and enthusiastically, exploring the wide range of Montessori and other materials, which are systematically displayed in the main room on accessible low-level shelving and in the well equipped outside areas. Presentations are offered when they are required. The children have good listening skills and display high levels of concentration and confidence as they are given opportunities for self initiated learning and are allowed to follow their inner needs during the three hour work cycle. They show respect for their environment through completing their cycle of activities, cleaning up after themselves and caring for plants and animals. They are shown how misuse of equipment has a negative impact on their environment. There is also a high level of co-operation between children in this vertically grouped environment due to the attention and care paid by the staff.

There are written policies and procedures in place and the process of planning, recording and assessment is also documented in the recently completed 'I CAN' portfolio. These are reviewed as necessary.

### **Learning and Development:**

The Montessori curriculum delivered at this nursery allows the children to make excellent progress towards the early learning goals as it is linked to the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) and the National Curriculum through the "Next Steps" form of record keeping. With the wide range of materials inside and outside and by following and effectively implementing the Montessori method, the six areas of learning are comprehensively covered. The planning is very extensive and includes: long and short term planning, topic webs, and activity planning sheets, as well as daily lesson plans.

Despite the fact that none of the staff work full time there are effective methods of communicating through general class observations and staff information books. Long term planning is based on the Montessori curriculum and short term planning follows the children's individual needs and interest. Relevant and regular short observations are made by all the staff with frequent assistance from the parents. They help the staff plan the children's educational journey and effective teaching helps the children progress and meet their developmental needs. Evaluating the observations would further enhance their progress. Areas for professional development are considered at the regular staff meetings.

The staff demonstrate their awareness that children develop at different rates and in different ways, and that all areas of learning and development are inter-connected and have equal importance, by allowing the children free access to the whole environment and providing them with an extended work cycle.

**Prepared Environment: resources and materials:**

Both the indoor and outdoor classrooms are well laid out and meticulously prepared. The school is especially well resourced with a sufficient quantity of high quality predominantly Montessori-appropriate materials which are suitable for the age and ability of the children in the nursery. Complete, appealing, systematically arranged equipment on the low-level shelving in the inside area makes the resources easily accessible, thus providing the children with a very favourable environment. There is plenty of space for the children to work on the floor or at a table as they choose. All staff take it in turns to look after the whole environment and the children are encouraged to help.

The enclosed outside areas help the children develop, understand the world around them and cover the curriculum in the fresh air. They are able to feed the birds and care for plants as well as having opportunities for large motor movements and lively play. The two separate outside areas are very well organized, resourced and maintained. The first of the outside areas caters more for Maths and Physical development with climbing apparatus, Wendy house and sand tray, and the second for Cultural as it is a more formal garden with grass, plants and bird feeders. The outside areas are alternated according to the weather and the children's needs. These areas add to the children's already rich experience in the nursery. There are also plants and animals to investigate and care for inside the classroom.

**Montessori practice: *independence, independence at home, freedom, respect.***

The staff have an excellent approach to promoting the children's independence by informing the parents about the Montessori Philosophy and allowing the children freedom and time to work things out for themselves. The children are encouraged to be independent from the beginning of the morning by hanging their coats and changing their shoes. They are given the freedom to move around the setting choosing which area they wish to work in, either inside or out, in the main classroom, or in the quiet area. They repeat exercises and complete their cycle of activity during the three hour work cycle. The children are trusted to go to the quiet area on their own. They are able to choose for themselves from a wide range of creative materials which they are able to access independently. They are also encouraged to look after

their own hygiene with visual prompts.

The staff's approach of only offering help when help is needed allows the children the opportunity to develop at their own rate. The practical life area includes the snack table and an accessible sink giving the children further opportunities to develop their independence as they chose and prepare their own snack, wash up, and put the dishes away. As the children are able to manage their own routines this also fosters independence.

The school has open evenings for the parents to discuss aspects of the Montessori philosophy to facilitate using it at home, and the parents are welcomed in the Nursery at the end of the morning. The Home link book provides further information for the parents.

The staff work well together as they communicate with each other during the morning. They are fine role models as they are positive and consistent and offer secure surroundings within well-defined boundaries without over praising the children. They give the children with additional needs the same opportunities but in a more controlled way. As the children are encouraged to care for their surroundings and are given the opportunity to work independently or as part of a group as they choose, with the guidance from the staff, all this contributes to fostering the children's respect for each other and their environment. The children's behavior is consequently very good.

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

The team work is very evident. It enables the children to have full range of the indoor and outdoor environment during the work cycle. The well planned setting inside and out promotes spontaneous learning, as the children are given time to observe , investigate and explore, and are able to choose where they work. The adults distribute themselves where they are needed.

A planned circle time takes place at the end of the morning giving the children the opportunity to come together as a group if they want to. The staff are allocated specific roles but these change on a daily basis and are not rigidly enforced. The extracurricular activities offered tend to be held during the afternoon so they do not interrupt the work cycle.

Chagford school operates a key person system. Each child is allocated two key workers to ensure that one is present when a child is in the school. They are primarily responsible for monitoring their group of children, including recording of observations and contributing to the overall planning and individual child assessment, liaising with the parents and with each other.

Presentations are given when they are needed as the staff observe the children, giving them ample opportunity to work independently following their natural rhythm of activity without unnecessary interruption. And children are given the opportunity to learn from each other in this vertically grouped environment. The combination of a very favorable and beautifully presented environment and sympathetic staff promote confident, articulate, calm and engaged children, some of whom only attend for very few sessions during the week.

Devon local authority provide a comprehensive transfer document which moves with each child to their next school.

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

All the staff are responsible for the well-being and safety of the children in the school. Effective methods of communication between the adults ensure that they achieve a balance between recognizing the need for the children to become independent and not curtailing their freedom without compromising the children's safety. Fire drills are carried out regularly and safety information is kept in a visible place in the kitchen. All the staff are responsible for keeping the setting clean and the equipment complete.

The school uses excellent systems to communicate with their parents and the parents feel very well informed by all the members of staff. They know who their children's key workers are and appreciate the informative newsletters, open evenings and presentations which are offered by the school even though they are not always able to attend. The yellow books are filled with informative photographs and the children's work is also accessible to the parents.

Parents and carers are welcome in the Nursery and the Children's Home Link Book is well used and appreciated by both the parents and staff. The parents feel that they are working in partnership with the school and owing to the fact that many of the children only attend infrequently it works as a form of effective communication. More formal and comprehensive evaluations and longer observations would enhance their practice further.

All the staff have a clear understanding of the requirements of the National strategies and the Early Years Foundation Stage and are able to share gathered information with the children's parents and next school through the Nursery Transfer document when they are due to leave.

### **Staffing:**

All the staff in the school are committed to the Montessori method of education. Two members of staff hold an International diploma and two the Montessori Foundation Certificate. Another is a qualified primary school teacher.

The staff work very well as a team and have a shared understanding of responsibilities, roles and routines. All the staff have an opportunity to observe each other and there is an effective appraisal system.

The opportunities for the staff to undergo professional development are very evident and changes in practice due to recent training are apparent in the outside area. Individual staff training is discussed regularly at the twice termly staff meetings and implemented as and when funding becomes available.

The high standard of the environment, adherence to the Montessori philosophy, and excellent communication between staff and parents is due to the commitment of the manager and all of her staff.

**Charlotte White**

Name of Assessor:

**17.03.2010**

Date of report: