



# **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" (2012/14). The second visit sought to assess the progress made on the recommendations set out in the report from the first visit as well as any further findings made during the second 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.

### **Children's House Montessori**

Birling Village Hall, Snodland Road, Birling, Kent ME19 5JG

Date of previous MEAB accreditation: November 2012

Date of first re-accreditation visit: 11 June 2015

Date of second re-accreditation visit: 15 October 2015

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

#### **Description of the nursery**

The Children's House Montessori nursery was established by its current owner/manager in 1998. The nursery operates from Birling Village Hall and serves both the local community and that of the surrounding rural area. The pack-away nursery has one open plan classroom, kitchen and toilet facilities and direct access to a large outdoor play area, in addition it makes use of the village play area and the nearby open countryside. The nursery has exclusive use of the premises during its hours of operation and has a large, lockable storage room which enables all of the resources and children's records to be stored securely when packed away.

The eighteen-place nursery caters for children from 2 to 5 years and opens Monday to Friday, term time only, from 09.30 until 12.30 on Monday, Tuesday and Friday and until 14.30 on Wednesday and Thursday. At the time of the second re-accreditation visit there were 11 children on the register, seven were present, five of whom stayed for the afternoon session, with three members of staff and a teaching practice student. Children who attend on Wednesday and Thursday usually stay for the full day, bringing a packed lunch with them. The school offers parents the opportunity to enroll their children in a



range of additional activities (for example, French and dance sessions). The nursery also offers a Parent/Toddler group fortnightly on a Tuesday afternoon.

The owner/manager holds Montessori qualifications covering the age range birth to 9 years. She is supported by two members of staff who hold Montessori qualifications and a student who is undertaking a Montessori qualification. The staff members work a range of full and part time hours to enable the nursery to meet ratio requirements and the needs of the children. They are trained in and have experience of working with children with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and English as an additional language. The nursery accesses advice and training support from the local authority.

## Summary

The Children's House Montessori nursery is a small, well resourced, rural nursery school. The owner/manager and the staff team are committed to offering the children they care for a balanced and stimulating educational experience that follows the ethos and principles of the Montessori method of education and of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) Framework. The staff members are well qualified and their team spirit allows them to work seamlessly to support the children's learning and development in all areas of the curriculum.

Children are confident and self-assured as they freely access a wide range of Montessori materials and other resources throughout the three hour work cycle. Children spontaneously follow their cycles of activity, only occasionally needing to be reminded to tidy away their activities. Staff know their key children very well, and therefore the children benefit from being introduced to activities that support their individual interests and offer appropriate levels of challenge.

Parents speak very highly of the nursery, commenting particularly on how they value the various methods of feedback used to give them a full picture of their children's time at nursery and their progress. Following recommendations from the previous MEAB accreditation the nursery continues to develop the methods it uses to explain the EYFS and Montessori curriculum and to share children's written documentation with parents. The third recommendation from the previous accreditation has been fully implemented as the nursery has now developed a full free flow experience for the children, making good use of staff deployment to ensure that children can access all the activities on offer in both the indoor and outdoor areas. Staff are passionate about ensuring that they offer every child in their care the fullest range of opportunities to fulfill their unique potential.

***The school provides an education which follows the principles of the Montessori approach and environment. The school has successfully addressed 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:**

- continue to review the written aims and policies of the setting so that they not only reflect but also mention the Montessori principles; and
- continue to give consideration to how the nursery can further embed links between the Montessori curriculum and the EYFS in their documentation.

**Philosophy:**

The nursery places great value on the key Montessori principle of “following the child” and this is evident as staff members describe their key children’s individual strengths and areas of development. Children are encouraged to “have a go” and are respectfully acknowledged as they concentrate on their chosen activities.

Each day at nursery is planned to reflect the dynamics of the group attending; however, staff are very skilled at introducing activities that blend in with the flow of the session and any spontaneous interests or needs expressed.

Children are comfortable and confident within the nursery environment as they either select or are directed towards a range of Montessori activities that have been developed and refined to meet their needs. Children receive individual lessons throughout the work cycle but also work together in small groups, enthusiastically discussing their tasks and organising their play. Children benefit from being completely trusted to independently access snack at a time that suits them, self-registering and competently discussing the range of fruits available and which their favourite is.

Since the first re-accreditation visit the nursery has begun the process of reviewing its documentation. However, the recommendation remains that the nursery would benefit from reflecting even more its passion about and belief in the Montessori method of education throughout its documentation. The expansion of its website would also enhance ‘first impressions’ for prospective parents.

**Learning and Development:**

The children can freely access a wide range of Montessori materials and other activities and spontaneously select what they want to do from the shelves; the areas of learning are very well defined and children confidently choose their activities; this creates a busy and very calm classroom environment. The wide range of natural and other materials encourages the children’s curiosity and extends their learning opportunities as they make links between what they have experienced in the outdoor space with the follow-on activities made available in the classroom.



The children are familiar with the routine of the session and easily engage in the flow of the nursery day as they converse with and guide one another during both individual and small group activities. The staff members interact very well with children on a 1:1 basis, offering very supportive care to the individual child; they are very knowledgeable about their key children and this enables them to direct children towards materials that offer age- and stage-appropriate levels of challenge. As children use the creative materials they keenly tell their peers and the adults around them about the processes involved, using a wide range of descriptive vocabulary which is encouraged and developed further by all the staff.

The free flow access to the adjoining outdoor space is very good and offers many opportunities for the development of both gross and fine motor skills; the children clearly enjoy the mud kitchen and wide range of water play that is available. Children are keen to explore the outdoor space and relish the opportunity to go out into the "big garden" to collect "spiky" leaves to use for art work. The outdoor space is used in all weathers; even the youngest children know that on cold, grey days they need their wellington boots and warm outer wear and are becoming accomplished at dressing themselves for the outdoors with minimal help from the adults.

Planning is clear and provides a good introduction to chosen themes; key persons use their in-depth knowledge of their key children to encourage the refinement of key skills and develop interest and engagement with the whole curriculum. The staff team, led by the experienced SENCo, work particularly well to support children with special educational needs, and their success in this area is reflected in the commendations offered by the parents of those children. The record-keeping within the nursery monitors children's progress against the outcomes of the EYFS; the children's Learning Journey books reflect their engagement with Montessori activities, but the links between the Montessori curriculum and the EYFS could be made clearer in the documentation in order to monitor progress more completely. Staff are experienced in completing the mandatory two year old progress check when children join the nursery at 2 years of age.

The staff support children's language development very well; this is reflected in the children's confidence and eagerness to communicate with both their peers and adults. Since the first re-accreditation visit staff have developed their use of open-ended questions to support the children's critical thinking skills and curiosity.

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

The Children's House Montessori nursery offers a traditional Montessori environment that facilitates children's independent learning through their use of the very well organised and well maintained range of Montessori materials; these are enhanced by other relevant, high quality materials and good use is also made of the natural resources that are readily available to the nursery. This plentiful range of materials offers the children good opportunities for freedom of choice both indoors and outside.



The Montessori curriculum areas are systematically laid out and lead the children's progression from acquiring basic skills to more complex activities. Children have good access to all of the materials and adequate space to choose, for example, whether to work at a table or use the floor space.

The environment benefits from the staff working together each morning to set up the classroom as it enables them to consider, on a daily basis, the dynamics of the groups attending and to ensure that all materials are complete and in good order. Staff take great pride in providing the children with a favourable environment.

The children's good understanding of the cycle of activity helps to support the maintenance of the environment; they enjoy working with the staff team to clean and prepare tables for lunch and have access to a good range of child-sized brooms and brushes which are used enthusiastically to tidy the classroom and outdoor space. Even those children who have recently joined the nursery in the new academic year have absorbed the ethos of the cycle of activity and need little reminding from staff about returning things to their place.

Since the first re-accreditation visit the resources available to extend children's engagement in imaginative play have been developed and children now have access to a wider range of focused, natural and recyclable materials that enhance their engagement in both child-initiated and teacher-planned imaginative play.

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

The uninterrupted flow of activity in the classroom and outdoor space is fully supported by the session's continuous work cycle. Children enter the classroom and are encouraged to put on their indoor footwear; they then immediately begin to access the materials. The children are fully involved in the preparation of fruit for their rolling snack, confidently using tools such as peelers and corers under staff supervision.

The older children have very good understanding of the cycle of activity and politely and confidently remind one another to "tidy" when resources are not returned to the shelves. All the children, even the younger ones who have recently joined the setting, capably complete their cycles of activity and play their part in keeping their nursery tidy and orderly.

Those children who stay for the longer day sessions benefit from working together to set up their lunch table, cleaning and preparing the correct number of places and choosing which of the wide range of natural resources to use to decorate the lunch table. During lunch children are encouraged to open their own lunch boxes and unwrap the contents independently, with staff recognizing that such activity will encourage smoother transition to 'big' school. Following lunch the children clear their own places,



clean the tables and return to freely accessing a range of teacher-led and independent activities; they come together at the end of the full day for a group session, thereby following the routine of the shorter daily sessions.

Parents support the children's independence in the setting by encouraging them to remove their own coats and shoes on entry and doing the reverse when leaving; feedback reflects how the children enjoy the opportunity to act independently and how this extends to the home environment.

### **Montessori practice: Classroom management**

The owner/manager is totally committed to reflecting the Montessori principles and ethos in the day to day practice of the nursery and works closely with the staff team to ensure that every child is given the fullest opportunity to flourish. The team value the time they spend preparing the classroom as it allows them to reflect on the layout of the classroom and how it meets the needs of the children they care for. The shared respect for, and in-depth knowledge of, the children supports very effective staff deployment throughout the whole three hour work cycle; this helps to ensure that the children are well supervised.

Each child has a key person who is responsible for maintaining their Learning Journeys, identifying next steps and planning to meet individual needs and interests. The whole team is involved in the organisation of daily planning. The nursery supports a number of children with additional needs and all staff members know these children very well, which leads to focused outcome planning and effective shared input in their progress. There is a good balance of teacher-led and self-initiated exploration and the children benefit from the vertical age grouping. Parents opt for their children to participate in the additional activities offered during the work cycle. Staff encourage the children to join in, which they normally do; however, they remain at liberty to choose not to join these groups.

Regular staff meetings to review the children's progress and the overall management of the sessions support the whole team's commitment to the on-going development of the nursery. The nursery's dedication to offering best practice within a Montessori setting is evident; it should continue to give careful consideration to reflecting this more fully in its documentation.

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

The nursery has very strong relationships with the parents of the children they care for; parents are warmly welcomed into the nursery at the beginning and end of each session and this gives them good opportunities to regularly discuss their children's progress with their key person. Parents and extended family members speak very highly of the nursery and the progress their children make.



In addition to the daily verbal feedback, the staff record children's learning and achievement throughout the day using a detailed progress grid and a Learning Journey book. The Learning Journey book is sent home to the parents at least once every half term; parents report how much they enjoy this record of their children's time at nursery, saying it allows them to really see what their child does whilst at nursery.

Parents are given a brief introduction to Montessori and the EYFS when they join the nursery and know that the owner/manager has a wide range of literature available that they can access at any time. They receive a written progress report twice a year and the nursery works closely with all of the local primary schools to develop effective transition practice and records, which are shared with the parents. Parents also receive newsletters and are invited to join their children on nursery trips to local amenities at least once a term.

The nursery has developed high levels of face to face interaction with their parents and should continue to develop its written documentation to reflect the very good practice that takes place on a day to day basis.

### **Staffing:**

The Children's House Montessori benefits from passionate and focused leadership; the owner/manager is very well qualified and experienced, holding Montessori diplomas covering birth to 6 years and 6 to 9 years. The staffing of the nursery has changed since the first re-accreditation visit; currently in addition to the owner/manager there are two other staff members with Montessori diplomas, one of whom has recently qualified and works part-time, and the nursery also mentors a student who is currently studying with the Montessori Centre International and who attends two days a week.

This is a committed team who demonstrate a passion for and an in-depth knowledge of the Montessori approach to education. The team attends regular training and continued professional development events organised by the local authority, the Montessori Schools Association and other professional organisations. The SENCo will undertake training to support any identified special or additional needs that children on the roll may have. Recently the owner/manager has visited Sweden to observe a nursery following the Empathetic Communication approach to early years and continues to embrace this approach in tandem with the Montessori ethos. The nursery regularly supports Montessori students by offering teaching practice placements. The team uses the morning set up time and formal staff meetings to reflect on and develop practice.

Regular staff supervision is being established and this will help the owner/manager to work with individual team members to identify training needs. Written records focusing on whole nursery development and individual staff supervision would benefit from further development. The nursery has many effective strategies and processes in place to support and review both the children and staff development; however, a clearer



written overview of the systems, the vision, policies and processes would enhance what is currently in place.

All staff have comprehensive job descriptions and an induction process is in place. They understand their roles very well and work together to offer the children a comfortable and inspiring early years' experience. The owner/manager is completely committed to the Montessori approach to education and is an excellent role model for adults and children both within the Children's House Montessori nursery and in the wider Montessori community. This nursery is inspirational in its dedication to offering those children who attend a caring and embracing Montessori experience.

Name of Assessor: Deborah Penny

Date report submitted: First visit – 14<sup>th</sup> June 2015

Second visit – 21<sup>st</sup> October 2015