



# 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) and subsequent revisions. 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.

### **Drakes Montessori Childcare**

19 Drakes Avenue, Exmouth, Devon EX8 4AB

Date of the first re-accreditation visit: 22 May 2014

Date of second re-accreditation visit: 31 July 2014

Date of previous MEAB accreditation: May 2011

This accreditation report relates to the provision for children aged 1 to 5 years

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

Drakes Montessori Childcare is situated in the seaside town of Exmouth and occupies parts of the ground floor, first floor and gardens of a detached, private home. The downstairs area consists of an entrance porch/cloakroom, toilet facilities, kitchen and two light and spacious rooms. The Garden Room, which overlooks the rear garden, provides a wealth of resources for physical and messy play in addition to Montessori curriculum materials. The Sunflower Room, which overlooks the front garden, is resourced with Montessori materials designed for the older child. There are separate rooms for children who need to sleep or rest on both the ground floor and first floor. The rear garden is used by the children daily.

Drakes Montessori is open for 46 weeks per year with flexible times to suit parents' needs. It is currently open from 8.00 to 17.30 on Mondays; from 8.15 to 17.30 on Tuesdays; from 8.30 to 17.30 on Wednesdays; from 8.00 to 18.00 on Thursdays; and from 8.00 to 15.00 on Fridays. There are 25 children on roll, of whom five are aged under 2 years and thirteen aged 2 to 5 years. Seven children who are aged 5 to 9 years attend after school hours and during school holidays. The children are vertically grouped and on the day of the second re-accreditation visit there were eight children between the ages of 1 and 5 years present for the whole day. The number of children who are registered to attend each day varies and staff attendance is accordingly matched to the required ratios of adults to children. There are currently no children under the age of one attending the setting. A healthy mid-morning and afternoon snack is provided, and



children bring their own lunch and dinner.

The setting opened in 2005 and is privately owned. It is able to support children with learning difficulties, special dietary needs and children who speak English as an additional language.

The registered childminder/owner is Montessori qualified. She employs a co-registered childminder who is also Montessori qualified, a qualified childcare assistant and additional assistants who work part time as required. The owner and main assistant work full time and the co-registered childminder works four days per week. Drakes Montessori is part of the local childminding network, as well as a member of PACEY (Professional Association for Childcare and Early Years), the Montessori Schools Association (MSA), and the MSA Childminders network.

## Summary

Drakes Montessori Childcare offers a warm, caring and supportive environment, where children are respected and parents are valued as important partners in the development of their children. Since the last MEAB accreditation the setting has addressed the two recommendations made; it has introduced paper-based, long narrative observations of the children, and staff peer observations are made and discussed verbally as part of the daily practice of this small team.

The Montessori philosophy and ethos underpin every aspect of the provision and are clearly shared with parents and role modelled by the staff team, who show respect for each child's individual needs. Although the Montessori materials are accessible throughout the whole day, the setting offers a minimum three hour work cycle in the morning, with a two and a half hour work cycle in the afternoon for those children who do not need to sleep.

The children all benefit from an immaculately prepared environment both inside and outside, with materials well organized into the areas of learning. The independence of all the children, including the very young, is immediately apparent. Children across the age range work alongside each other and are well supported by the adults who ensure that the children have access to planned and spontaneous learning opportunities. However, there are opportunities during the day for the adults to engage the older children in the pre-school age range in more challenging activities and it is recommended that observations of children are recorded in greater detail.

On the day of the second visit, Drakes Montessori were operating their summer school programme, which included two school-aged children who had previously attended the setting.

Parents are very appreciative of the facilities offered by Drakes Montessori Childcare and both parents and staff work in close partnership. The small, well qualified staff team work exceptionally well together to the benefit of every child.



***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:***

- It is recommended that the school continues to reflect on its practice in order to ensure that high standards are maintained.

### **Philosophy:**

The staff at Drakes Montessori are secure in their understanding of Montessori principles, they ensure that the Montessori philosophy and ethos informs their daily practice and they review this practice on a regular basis. This is particularly evident in the way that even the youngest children are gently encouraged to be independent and to do things for themselves. For example, children put on their own socks and shoes or wellington boots when going outside and help to cut fruit for snack. All children are encouraged to complete their cycles of activity. One child aged 18 months was observed, after a gentle reminder from the adult who had been working with her, to re-stack the Russian Doll that she had been engrossed with for over 15 minutes and return it to the low shelf before starting a new activity.

Child-sized equipment, attractive materials which are readily available, and an environment where children are respected and trusted by the adults, enables all the children to access the resources both inside and outdoors with genuine freedom of choice. Vertical grouping at Drakes Montessori is well established. During the second visit this was particularly evident in the way that children across the whole age range interacted with each other co-operatively in the garden.

Learning is clearly child-led; staff are sensitive to the needs and well-being of all the children, whom they evidently know well. Information about the Montessori approach and about how the setting operates is available to prospective parents on the Drakes' website and is given to parents when their child starts the setting.

### **Learning and Development:**

The rooms are light, spacious and well-resourced. Both the Garden Room and the Sunflower Room are very well organised into the Montessori areas of learning, along with ample resources for role play, craft and other activities. The materials fully cover the Montessori curriculum and the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) areas of learning. Outside, there are abundant opportunities for children's social, physical, creative, and cognitive development. The recently established Mud Kitchen was being used extensively by the older children during the first re-accreditation visit. Even the very youngest children move independently from one activity to another, asking adults



for help when they need it, throughout the work cycle. The adults consistently respond sensitively to each child and, when appropriate, adults engage children in open-ended questions, allowing children time to think and to work things out for themselves. The children settle easily, are happy and enjoy learning new skills.

Staff plan activities as a whole team, both at regular staff meetings and more informally on a daily basis, with long term planning based around the seasons and local interests. In addition, staff consider the needs of their key children and share these with the rest of the team, who assist all children as the need arises. Where necessary, additional support is given to children with specific educational needs in liaison with the local authority. All planning is clearly linked to both the EYFS areas and Montessori curriculum through the use of the recently introduced electronic recording and assessment web-based system, and this information is shared with parents on a daily basis.

Individual learning at Drakes is diverse due to the age range of the children attending; the very youngest children receive outstanding 1:1 attention and support. The older children benefit from the high staff ratio which supports sustained shared thinking. For example, one child couldn't understand why the Ribbler, crinkling paper activity, was so stiff to operate and the adult asked her if she knew why. The child then examined the machine and was able to work out that she had put the paper in the wrong place.

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

The prepared environment at Drakes Montessori is immaculately maintained, indoors and outside. The Garden and Sunflower Rooms are spacious, uncluttered and decorated in pastel shades. The well maintained wooden floor in the Garden Room is kept clean with the 'no shoes' policy – children, staff and visitors remove their shoes before entering this area. This provides an environment that enables the very youngest children to crawl and move around the floor freely. There are also carpeted areas which offer comfort and minimise noise levels. These are ideal for use when playing on the floor with, for example, wooden construction bricks. The three patio doors in the Garden Room facilitate free-flow between indoors and outdoors and the appropriate supervision of the children.

The calm, homely environment is quiet, light and spacious and resourced with ample Montessori and other high quality equipment and activities. Indoors, these are displayed on low shelves and tables, readily accessible to the children and there are sofas and chairs, which provide comfortable and cosy seating especially when stories are being read. Outdoors, there are lots of resources for sand and water play, moving and carrying, sweeping, riding bikes and wonderful natural opportunities for balancing and experimenting.

The Garden Room is used by children across the age range for craft and messy play, activities of everyday living, sensorial, culture and early numeracy and literacy activities. The Sunflower Room has Montessori activities mainly designed for use by the older children in the under 5 age range, although it can be made available for other ages. On the second visit the Sunflower Room was being used by the older children who were



engaged in word building with the Large Moveable Alphabet. There are also cots and a bed in separate rooms for children who need to sleep.

There is an atmosphere of respectfulness within the setting, both for the equipment and for each other, which the owner and staff role model effectively.

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

The children are encouraged to be independent from the moment they arrive –they ring the doorbell, which is at their level. They remove their own shoes or are supported to do so according to their level of independence, they then take their lunch bags to the kitchen. Older children support the younger ones in finding their name on the shelf in the fridge and in putting their lunch items next to their name.

Throughout the work cycle children's independence is fostered and respected. For example, all children regardless of their age can choose their own activity by taking it from the low shelves and engaging with it for as long as they wish without interruption. Children indicate their need for help either verbally, or by their actions (for example, by taking the adult's hand and leading them to where they want the adult to go). During the second visit, a 17 months old child was engaged for an extended period of time independently threading a number of items. When she had finished she unthreaded these and returned the activity to the shelf with a triumphant expression. They are shown how to handle materials without damaging them and observe adults treating the environment with the same level of respect. They are given the choice of working on their own, with their friends or alongside an adult.

The emphasis on fostering independence is also evident outdoors where, for example, even the youngest children are given the opportunity to negotiate the wide steps up from the patio or to walk up the grassy slope, independently but under close supervision.

During the first re-accreditation visit children across the 1 to 5 year age range helped prepare the snack by peeling and cutting up fruit and vegetables and putting the waste into the compost or recycle bins in the kitchen. There is a great deal of opportunity for 'learning by doing' built into snack time as other children assist in cleaning tables and setting out china cups, bowls and straws and afterwards they can sweep up and clear dishes into the dishwasher. Children and staff sit down as a group at snack time as the adults rightly see this as an important opportunity to encourage social skills and language development during meal times. Similarly, at lunch time children collect their lunches from the fridge, select cutlery and plates and eat independently, with the very youngest children supported by an adult as appropriate. After lunch, children again put their dishes into the dishwasher and clear up before wiping their own faces with personal flannels. Staff have high expectations for children's behaviour. They encourage and role model good manners, courtesy and care for others, which is reflected in the way all children, even the youngest, behave.



The owner and her team work in close partnership with parents, who are very appreciative of advice from the staff about steps they can take at home to foster their child's growing independence. Parents also receive regular information via newsletters, on the Parents' Drakes My Montessori Child web site and from emails, in addition to a brief explanation of some aspects of the Montessori approach given during the Montessori and Mince Pies evening held annually in December and during the Garden Party in the summer.

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

Drakes Montessori is a childminding setting that offers a lovely environment for children across a wide age range. Currently children between the ages of 1 and 9 years attend the setting, either throughout the day, or after school and/or during the school holidays. Children of diverse ages play alongside each other, with a real emphasis on child-led and spontaneous activities. The adults are secure in their understanding of child development and gently and unobtrusively reinforce the cycle of activity especially amongst the younger children, whilst being fully aware of individual and age appropriate capability. On the day of the first re-accreditation visit the older children up to 5 years of age mainly chose painting, play dough and craft activities during the morning session and were confident in setting these up and clearing them away.

All children under 5 years attend for a minimum of three hours per day, with most children attending for a longer period, as on the day of the first visit. From the moment they arrive, they have free choice of activities both indoors or outside, except in very bad weather. Staff move quietly amongst them giving 1:1 support or observing as required. At an appropriate point in the morning children and staff join together briefly for group snack. Some children go to the kitchen because they want to help get snack ready, whilst other children begin to put their activities away and to tidy up. Even the very youngest children are included in preparing snack and serving their friends, and all children demonstrate very good table manners.

On the day of the first visit all the children went outside after snack as the rain had been torrential earlier in the morning. Getting ready to go outside was managed very well, adults supported the children as they busied themselves putting on their own coats, socks and, if they wished, wellington boots. The adults asked children what equipment they wanted taken out of the garden storage and the children engaged confidently in a range of physical and creative activities, then helped to put the resources away when it was time for lunch.

After lunch, all the younger children sleep in separate rooms on the ground floor and first floor, whilst the older children engage again in self-chosen activities.

Adults ensure that the rooms used by the children are welcoming and inclusive. There are posters and pictures on display showing children from different ethnic backgrounds and the doormat has greetings written in different languages for the children to look at. Adults monitor the materials on the shelves to ensure that they are complete and ready for children to use. On the day of the second visit, the older children were well supported by the staff in a range of challenging activities and to think critically about



what they were doing.

From time to time children are taken out of the setting on local walks or to places of educational interest to support their learning, with parental agreement.

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

The registered childminder and her staff team place partnership with parents high on their agenda. Consequently, when parents register their child at Drakes Montessori, they receive a wealth of information, including the prospectus, mission statement, policies, permissions required and information about annual parent/staff events, either online or via paper copies. They also receive information about the role of the key person in supporting the new child within the setting and the key person's role in liaising with new parents.

Parents have regular opportunities to share information about their child with the key person and, where appropriate, additional support is put in place.

Since the recent introduction of the electronic recording and assessment system, parents are given their own secure password so that information between home and setting can be exchanged quickly and in confidence. Observations, photographs and daily activities within the context of both the EYFS areas and Montessori curriculum are logged, along with next steps for their child's learning, and this makes medium and short term planning for their child readily visible. Parents speak very enthusiastically about the new system, although both parents and staff agree that verbal exchanges at the beginning and end of each day are still invaluable.

Following the first re-accreditation visit there is a great deal of evidence that the staff have reviewed their use of the electronic system, which they are now using much more effectively to the benefit of all the children. The staff observe, photograph, record and log the observations throughout the day.

Children who attend another setting alongside their attendance at Drakes have a 'link book', introduced by the registered childminder, so that information about what the child is doing can be shared between settings. A comprehensive set of documents is passed on to a new setting when the child leaves.

There are effective systems in place should parents have any concerns about their child, and the co-registered childminder has initiated two parent surveys that give parents the opportunity to provide feedback – anonymously if they wish. Every day, a member of staff enters the times of arrival and departure of each child and completes the 'Daily Checks' lists.

### **Staffing:**

Drakes Montessori Childcare is privately owned by the registered childminder who has a Montessori International Diploma, many years' childminding experience and previously



trained as a Registered General Nurse and Registered Sick Children's Nurse. She is supported by a co-registered childminder who has a BA (Hons) degree in Early Childhood Studies, a Montessori International Diploma, Early Years Teacher Status and a Masters degree in Language and Communication Impairment in Children. They are supported by a qualified Level 3 childcare assistant. All are qualified paediatric first aiders and have relevant additional training, including food hygiene. In addition, there are two further members of staff available for cover and another assistant who is responsible for general maintenance. Overall the staff are very well qualified and experienced.

When staff join the setting they receive detailed job descriptions and a comprehensive induction process that covers all aspects of the children's care and education. Termly staff meetings are minuted and staff members' continued professional development is continually facilitated, including through workshops that are often held at the setting. Other early years professionals are invited to attend these workshops and this is very powerful way of extending awareness of the Montessori ethos within the local community. Staff regularly attend Montessori conferences and Montessori regional meetings.

The registered childminder and her highly dedicated team work extremely well together. Procedures and practices are continually being reviewed, both formally and informally, which further strengthens this excellent provision and which is of enormous benefit to all the children and families who attend.

Name of Assessors: Maureen Taylor and Wendy Compson

Date of report: 31<sup>st</sup> July 2014