

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 relevant 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 and considered 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.

Receiving accreditation carries the expectation that settings will continue to work on the issues highlighted in this report and will remain committed to the ongoing development of their practice. Furthermore, that they will report to the MEAB office any relevant changes such as to premises address, ownership, hours of operation or to the age range of children attending.

Holly Grange Montessori Nursery

1 Warrington Road, Cuddington, Northwich, Cheshire CW8 2LH

Date of previous MEAB accreditation: June 2014

Date of first reaccreditation visit: 11 May 2017

Date of second reaccreditation visit: 23 August 2017

This accreditation is valid until December 2021

This accreditation report relates to the provision for children aged 3 months to 4 years 11 months.

Description of the nursery:

Holly Grange Montessori Nursery is located in the village of Cuddington. It is in a two-storey detached property with parking to the front and side, and an enclosed garden to the rear. On the ground floor is the Baby Room for children aged 3 to 18 months and Class 1 for children aged 18 to 24 months, both of which have a sink and changing facilities. Also on this floor is the Pre-school room for children aged between 3½ and 4 years 11 months old, which also has a sink unit in the room for its children. This room extends into a conservatory that has direct access to an enclosed area within the garden. The office and kitchen are also located on this floor. On the first floor are two rooms: Class 2 is for children aged 2 to 2½ years old and Class 3 is for those aged 2½ to 3½ years old.

Outside, there is a large covered patio, a section with artificial grass and a shelter, an area with a safety surface that is used for ride-on toys, a grassed area and a bark chip surface that surrounds fixed wooden balance beams. There are tables, chairs, planters, gardening equipment and a wide variety of other resources outside. An area separated by a low fence is designated for the Baby Room's exclusive use.

The nursery is open between 08.00 and 18.00 daily, for 51 weeks of the year. Children attend full days or mornings only, and there are currently 84 on roll. The nursery is registered for a maximum of 42 children to attend at any one time. On the day of the second visit 29 children attended in the morning and 25 stayed for the afternoon. Seven children under 2 years old attended for both the morning and afternoon sessions, they had three members of staff with them all day. Lunches and teas are cooked on site and are provided for all children who attend at these times. Holly Grange Montessori Nursery is able to provide for children with additional needs, including those for whom English is an additional language.

The nursery was established in 2007 and is one of two owned by the managing director, who shares her time between both settings. She is Montessori qualified, with Early Years Professional Status, a BA in Early Childhood and a level 3 Forest School qualification. There are thirteen other staff members, one holds a Montessori qualification, five hold degree level qualifications and six are qualified to level 3 in early years. The managing director is supported by a management team of three, led by a manager. Most staff members work full-time. On the day of the second visit there were eight members of staff present in both the morning and the afternoon.

Summary

The nursery follows the principles of the Montessori approach in its provision across the age range. It offers an engaging learning environment with many opportunities for social development. Children are well cared for in each classroom by adults who know that their primary role is to nurture each individual child. The welcoming atmosphere fosters appropriate emotional support for young children as they progress in all areas of their development. The adults provide opportunities for children to challenge themselves, to take risks and to learn at their own pace.

The outdoor environment is used frequently and is well loved by the children. Following the first reaccreditation visit the Pre-school room's outdoor area has been redesigned so that it can provide both a shared space for all children in the nursery and be used as an extension of the Pre-school room's learning environment when it is not being visited by the younger age range. The nursery is very well-resourced throughout and, following the first visit, improvements to the provision for open-ended and spontaneously chosen creative activities have also been made.

In following the recommendations made at the previous MEAB accreditation the nursery has developed the recording practices in Class 1 to ensure all aspects of children's development are carefully monitored, and it has developed the staff induction process to allow experienced team members to share their knowledge.

The staff team is keen to extend its reflective practice, it is forward-thinking and open to change, enabling it to provide for children's current needs and interests. Team members work hard to reflect on what they offer in their classrooms, and support each other very well. They are prepared to reflect further on the Montessori aspects of their provision, and are professional enough to both offer and accept positive feedback about their practice. It would be beneficial for the setting to put in place a plan to increase the number of Montessori qualifications held by staff.

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:

- to encourage staff members to continue to reflect on their own Montessori practice and receive constructive comments from peers; and
- to plan how to increase the number of Montessori qualifications held by staff.

Philosophy:

The Montessori provision is very good. The nursery puts the child first and the adults work flexibly to ensure that the environment and their provision best meets the needs of the children on any particular day.

The nurturing approach begins in the Baby Room where children are afforded both time and space to develop as individuals. Patient and responsive adults in this room tune in to the children in order to provide effective support. Class 1 is now a well-established room, having been created during the course of the previous MEAB accreditation. The greater mobility of these children is well supported through the use of space to allow for their freedom of movement, and they have increasing opportunities to become involved in the care of their classroom.

In Class 2 the adults use clear, friendly and gentle language to communicate with the children, whose growing independence is very well promoted by the observant and responsive staff. Class 3 builds on this support and fully provides for the children's emerging social skills; many of its activities can be done by two or more children at once. Staff members use careful interventions to either redirect children or extend their thinking.

The children in the Pre-school room have a rich Montessori environment to explore, with attentive staff to support them. It is a gregarious community and the team works to nurture the social and emotional skills of the children here so they are able to make the most of this busy learning environment. There are daily opportunities for the children to mix across the age range, such as when they are outdoors.

The educational principles and goals are set out in the prospectus and on the website. These reflect the Montessori approach of the nursery and are reviewed by staff annually at a staff meeting.

Learning and Development:

During the first reaccreditation visit children in all the rooms were observed to be learning effectively through their use of self-selected resources and also with adult support. In the afternoon there were examples of adult-led group work, although the children still enjoyed the opportunity for independent choice of activity. The outdoor space was used by all classes during the day. The Baby Room and Classes 1, 2 and 3 have set times to be outside and have ample fresh air daily. The Baby Room's outdoor area is demarcated by low fencing, which allows older siblings and friends from other classes to socialise with them when they are outside at the same time. The Pre-school room's children are able to enjoy a well-managed free-flow system, whereby a limited number of them can be outside at any one time during their morning work cycle. These children self-register their interest to indicate their choice of environment.

In the Baby Room and Class 1 the children are able to rest and feed when they desire. The activities made available offer physical and cognitive engagement at appropriate levels for their development. Older children in Class 1 are introduced to the Montessori cycle of activity, which is encouraged appropriately by staff for the individual child. The adults demonstrate sensitivity and responsiveness to each child's needs and a high level of awareness of their development.

Class 2 offers a calm atmosphere, the children make choices and explore in an emotionally supportive environment. The activities chosen are developmentally appropriate and adults in this room show a secure understanding of the need for children to work alone at times, to make discoveries at their own pace. Children's conversations are valued and language development is nurtured by the adults through their skilled use of a broad range of methods.

Children in Class 3 choose activities that challenge them and they have the time to explore and to repeat what they had done in order to consolidate their learning. They enjoy their freedom of choice, which often leads to the formation of small groups, where children share resources and collaborate in their activity. Adults in this room engage in sustained shared thinking with children through well-paced conversation. The good quality resources for understanding the world curriculum are complemented by the adults providing the children with engaging information and conversation related to the topics being investigated.

The Pre-school room has a wide array of activities, Montessori and additional materials, that engage all children in the class. The use of their outdoor space during the work cycle allows them to make significant choices about where they work, and gives them more space to spread out. There is a very good range of opportunities for play, including large wooden building blocks available for the children to create structures. Their use of this equipment fully promotes both physical and social development very well. These

children are also encouraged to offer staff meaningful input regarding the resourcing of their class, as they use a planning board on which they record what they would like added.

The nursery offers Forest School sessions once a fortnight, which are held off-site in the grounds of a local independent school. The nursery provides minibus transport and seven children attend, with two members of staff. Children who are over 3 years old may go, so groups are rotated to ensure that all who are eligible access the sessions in turn. Yoga and music and movement groups are offered weekly to all children. These sessions are delivered by trained or external staff. In addition to this, a member of staff plays songs on her guitar to children from all rooms once a week. These activities provide further enrichment to the children.

Each child has an online learning journey record, to which any member of staff working with them can add observations and photographs. The digital record-keeping system is password-protected and devices do not leave the nursery. It links effectively the Montessori curriculum with the learning and development areas of the Early Years Foundation Stage. The records are used to inform the planning for individuals, which is completed by the key person for each child. Long-term and topic activity planning is drawn up by each room's team, and tracking meetings held every other month between a manager and each team are used to review the provision offered to the class, with the focus being on meeting the whole group's needs. This practice ensures that the quality of the planning is excellent and fits well with the changing needs of the group. The management team also keeps an overview of all individual observations and planned next steps to ensure that appropriate and challenging activities are planned for every child. The nursery is fully inclusive and can differentiate activities to enable all the children to make the most of the excellent learning and development provision.

Prepared Environment: resources and materials

Each classroom is arranged to enable children to move about freely and to access the materials easily; in each, the resources are organised into distinct areas of learning, and are all placed on open shelving or on low surfaces within reach of the children. They are able to work on the floor or at tables, and there is ample space for either choice. The range in each room is also excellent. The babies have a very wide variety of resources on offer, with mats, soft seating areas and furniture that aids their developing mobility. Low mirrors, treasure baskets and books feature alongside 'light and sound' toys and soft toys.

The quality of resources is excellent in every room. They are complete and ready for all children to use, and are clearly appealing. For example, in Class 3 during the first reaccreditation visit, a child played with a 'Five Currant Buns' glove puppet and both used and talked about this resource in a natural and joyful way. The quantity of resources is sufficient for the number of children in each room. Following a recommendation made at the first visit, additional resources have been provided so that children are now able to self-select from a range of visual art, modeling and musical materials in Classes 2, 3 and Pre-school.

The quality of the outdoor provision is also very high, with well laid out areas of open space, balance equipment, wooden shelters with seating and a very broad range of equipment to support physical development and exploration, including resources for gardening and for outdoor nature-based activities. In the babies' outdoor area there is a sand pit, water tray, large physical play activities and wheeled toys. Following a recommendation made at the first visit, more effective use is now made of the outdoor area adjacent to the Pre-school room to give greater freedom and choice for all children to access the range of the outdoor provision. Furthermore, the addition of artificial grass now provides more space for exploration, imaginative and physical play.

Staff and children work together to look after their rooms. Alongside the checks made on materials to ensure appropriateness for use, staff support children in taking care of their environment through the use of dustpans, brushes, sponges and cloths. The resources available provide an enriching environment that promotes children's learning and development extremely well.

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

The adults work very well throughout the setting to enable and support each child's emerging independence. They provide developmentally appropriate resources and understand that all children progress in carrying out tasks if given the opportunity to try them by themselves. Children are encouraged to dress themselves, and parents are asked to make sure children are wearing clothes that they can manage.

The morning work cycle in Classes 2, 3 and the Pre-school room serves to develop these children's independence through the provision of 2½ hours of free choice. During this time children are trusted to use their learning environment to meet their needs, to make decisions about what to do, who to do it with and how long to do it for. Children can repeat activities as often as they wish. They are able to work individually or in small, child-led groups. Adult-led groups also build up spontaneously and through invitation, and children are free to join or leave these as they wish. In the afternoon children are able to continue to work on freely-chosen tasks, although group activities take place as well.

The trust that the adults demonstrate towards the children is very high. After one to one presentations children are given the choice to repeat, extend or finish with materials, and are guided gently to make that choice themselves. This creates an atmosphere where the decisions of the children are respected and supported appropriately. Children respond by handling the resources with care and by working very well together. During the first reaccreditation visit one child was working with the Montessori broad stair and spontaneously began combining the pink tower and cylinders with it. Adults responded by observing but refraining from intervening, allowing the child to self-direct their own activity. Ground rules are relevant and clear for each age group.

Each child has a named peg and drawer, and a place for their belongings. In each class and outside there are drinking water stations. During mealtimes children in all classes

are encouraged to use cutlery and to feed themselves independently. In Classes 1, 2, 3 and the Pre-school the children take turns to prepare the tables, set out the mats and cutlery, pour drinks and serve food. Children eat meals in their own classrooms. Babies and Class 1 children sleep in Class 1; children in Classes 2 and 3 can sleep in Classes 1 or 3.

Through key persons' interactions with parents, the approach of the nursery to the promotion of children's independence is shared on an individual family basis, allowing staff to offer specific support, for example regarding dressing skills.

Montessori Practice: links with parents, including reports and records

The links with parents are excellent. Information is shared on a daily basis, and the record-keeping procedures are clear and efficient so that any staff member who has contact with parents when they are collecting their children is able to pass relevant information on. Parents use the digital recording-keeping system to stay up to date with observations and notes about their child's progress. This system also offers them ideas of how they can support their child at home and allows for their feedback and observations to be communicated to staff. The nursery also shares information and photographs using other electronic media. Homework bags are available for families to borrow, these contain artefacts and activity suggestions. The weekly newsletters offer further suggestions for home learning activities and parent literature is available to borrow. The website includes information on Montessori practice as well as details of the Forest School sessions and dietary information. Parents are invited to an annual 'Family in the Forest' day to experience a taster session of Forest School activities with their children.

Before children first start at the nursery their parents are shown around and are introduced to the Montessori philosophy, they are also asked to contribute to a baseline assessment of their child on entry. Reports are written for children when in transition between the rooms, the mandatory two year old progress check is completed when appropriate, and the Montessori checklists which have been recently introduced allow staff to easily evaluate the child's progress across all areas of learning. Parental input is invited for all these records. A summative report is compiled when a child leaves the setting, at which point the child's reports are given to the parents. If the child is moving on to school it also receives the leaver's report and any information regarding specific needs.

The nursery holds three parents' evenings each year, one specifically for Pre-school parents. It invites feedback through questionnaires which are sent out three times a year and encourages family members to come in to talk to the children about the work they do and to get involved in baking, music, gardening and crafts. The older children are also given questionnaires to complete regarding activities and meals at the nursery. The team works closely together and with each child's family to generate a strong sense of community at Holly Grange Montessori Nursery. Feedback from parents is excellent and highlights the independence of the children and the caring nature of staff.

Staff: qualifications, deployment, and performance management

The nursery is well led by the managing director who is supported by the management team. The staff members working with children under 2 years old are suitably qualified and experienced to do so.

As part of the effective induction process, new staff are allocated a mentor and a 'Parent Buddy'. This allows them to receive feedback from more experienced staff members. Initial training is given on the Montessori philosophy of the nursery, on policies and on the digital record-keeping system. All members of staff have clear job descriptions. They attend regular in-service training days, which include sessions on Montessori practice, and have the opportunity to attend national Montessori conferences. They benefit from peer observations, which are carried out regularly across the setting. These are monitored by the management team and are used in a supportive manner for continuing professional development. This support could be further developed through continued use of constructive comments to challenge understanding and to promote progressive thinking about the philosophy and approach individuals take. Each room's team completes room improvement plans to ensure that the materials and activities are relevant to children's current interests and needs. Staff members also have appraisals twice a year carried out by the management team and attend monthly minuted staff meetings.

The nursery has a clear development plan that focuses not only on operational changes and improvements but also on how it can develop its Montessori practice throughout the nursery. Increasing the number of Montessori qualifications held by staff would be beneficial to the development of the team. The adults work very effectively together and are particularly supportive towards staff members who are new to the nursery or to a room. This helps ensure that a consistent approach is upheld by all staff so that the children can benefit fully from this respectful and caring team.

Name of Assessor: Jeremy Clarke

Date report submitted: First visit – 30th May 2017

Second visit – 31st August 2017