

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". The second visit sought to assess the progress made following 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.

Malton Montessori School and Nursery

Uplands House, Castle Howard Road, Malton, North Yorkshire, YO17 6NJ

Date of first accreditation visit: 12 April 2011

Date of second accreditation visit: 27 June 2011

This accreditation report relates to the provision for children from birth to five years

Description of the school:

Malton Montessori school is a privately owned setting catering for children from birth to five years (with plans to extend provision up to 11 in the near future). The school, which is located on the edge of the rural market town of Malton, operates from the ground floor of a large residential property, with additional purpose-built accommodation for the baby unit in an adjacent building. The main school comprises five rooms, between which the children are free to move around. The easily accessible outside area provides a range of learning environments including a hard-surfaced playground, climbing frames, growing area, water centre, lawn and outdoor theatre.

The baby unit (nursery) consists of two playrooms plus a dedicated sleeping area, kitchen, changing facilities and play verandah.

The school is open each weekday from 07:30 to 18:00 for 48 weeks of the year (closed for one week at Easter, one week in August and two weeks at Christmas, plus bank holidays). The school is registered for 30 children aged birth to five, with 83 currently on the register. Support is provided for children with language development delay and for those with English as an additional language.

There are 14 members of staff of whom three hold, and a further three are working towards, Montessori qualifications. All other members of staff hold appropriate early years qualifications.

Summary and conclusion.

Malton Montessori School and Nursery is a well run setting that is committed to the implementation of Montessori principles and practice. These principles are clearly set out in

the Guide to Parents, and shared with staff through an effective induction programme. Freedom and independence are promoted strongly, with children in the main school able to move freely from room to room and outside, benefitting from the rich array of available resources and a full two and a half to three hour work cycle. Provision of separate facilities for the under-twos ensures that their needs are met equally well.

Following the first accreditation visit access to the outside area is now available at all times, and staff actively encourage all children to make use of this excellent facility. All areas of the curriculum are extremely well provided for, although opportunities for children to explore and develop literacy and numeracy skills are less evident outside. Adults provide good support for children's learning, expertly scaffolding and developing their self-initiated lines of enquiry without ever interrupting unnecessarily.

Detailed observations, and careful evaluation of learning allow staff to closely monitor children's development and inform planning, although recently developed systems for recording children's achievements have not yet been fully embedded in practice. Liaison with parents, who are actively encouraged to participate in the life of the school, is outstanding, and greatly enhances the children's experience.

Strong leadership, effective management and supportive teamwork all contribute to the smooth running of this setting and provide firm foundations for future development. Response to the accreditation process has been extremely positive demonstrating a high level of commitment to continuous improvement.

The school provides an education which follows the principles of the Montessori approach and environment. This merits accreditation by the Montessori Evaluation and Accreditation Board.

The school has successfully achieved the points for action recommended on the first visit. Consideration should be given to the following points for further development:

- Continue to develop the use of the outside area to provide further opportunities for numeracy and literacy
- Fully implement and evaluate the new processes for recording children's development

Philosophy:

Malton Montessori School fully embraces Montessori's ideals of nurturing the child, meeting the needs of families and creating a favourable environment in which adults guide and support children's learning whilst maintaining an atmosphere of freedom and independence.

The school's principles, goals and philosophy are clearly set out in the online prospectus and Guide for Parents. The newly extended staff induction pack provides a clear overview of Montessori principles and practice which, in conjunction with the staff handbook and ongoing training, ensures everyone is well-informed on this aspect of the school's philosophy. Self-initiated learning is strongly promoted as children move freely around the environment, indoors

and outside, allowing them always to find the right activity to meet their developmental needs and interests. Staff are caring and supportive as they provide the right level of interaction and guidance without interfering unnecessarily in children's self-chosen activities. Regular reviews of the school's principles and goals ensure there is a shared understanding and includes input from parents, staff and children.

Learning and Development:

Learning is organized following the Montessori curriculum with reference to the six areas of the EYFS curriculum. The nursery and pre-school plan separately, but there is regular liaison to ensure a consistent and cohesive approach and a smooth transition as children progress through the school.

A detailed long-term plan provides a useful framework for delivery of the curriculum, ensuring all areas are covered thoroughly and provides a structure for each term with relevant festivals, events, outings and other seasonal activities identified in advance. Weekly planning, based on a highly effective programme of observation and assessment, identifies appropriate Montessori presentations for individual children and additional enrichment linked to the needs and interests of the group.

Activities are for the most part child-initiated, with children free to move from room to room and/or outside throughout the morning and afternoon work cycles. As a result, opportunities for spontaneous, self-initiated learning are excellent. Adults are deployed very effectively, following the children as they move freely around the classrooms and outdoor areas, to ensure that children are always appropriately supervised and well-supported in their learning. Each room offers a rich assortment of suitable activities clearly grouped within curriculum areas and easily accessible to the children. A separate art room provides children with ample opportunity for self-initiated and adult-led art activities using a rich variety of readily available resources. Opportunities in other areas of the creative curriculum, such as music-making and socio-dramatic play have been greatly extended since the first accreditation visit, with further developments planned, offering children an excellent range of creative experiences indoors and outside.

A separate building specifically designed around needs of babies and toddlers provides an appropriately proportioned, well-planned environment, which allows freedom of movement and access to a wide range of suitable, stimulating activities, both indoors and within an enclosed verandah area. They also have regular, supervised access to the nursery garden. Good support is available for children with additional learning needs.

Prepared Environment: resources and materials

The baby and toddler rooms are inviting and stimulating. They contain a good range of materials and activities suitable for this age group and are well ordered with activities easily accessible to the babies and toddlers. An excellent range of well-organized, attractive, accessible practical life activities, including low-level work-top and sink, and snack area, help

children to develop independence from an early age. In the toddler room children have access to a low-level climbing frame, rapidly developing very good gross motor skills as a result. In the baby room an appropriate range of attractive and stimulating treasure baskets encourage active, independent exploration.

In the main school, children have access to an outstanding range of materials across all areas of the Montessori curriculum, supplemented by a rich assortment of additional activities. Rooms are bright and airy, well planned with plenty of space for children to choose to work on the floor. Resources are very well ordered, with activities grouped by curriculum area and sequenced to make it easy for children to find and select the activities they want to use. All resources, including those in the art room and outside, are easily accessible, allowing children to work independently. Recently added resources for creative activities, such as a bottle xylophone in the garden, and increased use of the outdoor theatre, music-making and materials for socio-dramatic play have greatly extended children's creative experiences.

Outdoor learning is highly valued and actively encouraged. As a result, excellent use is made of the various outdoor areas, providing ample opportunities for scientific experimentation, role play, creative, physical and nature activities. However, opportunities for exploring numeracy and literacy are not as evident in the outdoor areas. The 'Discovery Room' contains a wealth of cultural activities (including a rabbit and tortoise) plus more advanced literacy and numeracy materials to extend more able children. Resources are of a very high quality, plentiful, well maintained and suitable for the learning and development needs of children across the full age range of the school.

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

Adults encourage children's freedom and independence as they give them the freedom to form and disband groups with or without adults. Children are actively encouraged to move freely between the different classrooms and outside areas to seek out the activity they would like to join or engage in. Adults give children time and space to select their own activities without pressure. When children need re-directing – such as when they cannot choose for themselves or if they would benefit from an alternative activity/presentation – staff provide sensitive support.

Parents are encouraged to think about what their children are capable of doing through 'I can' sheets, thereby encouraging children's independence beyond the nursery into the home. Respect for others, the resources and the environment are promoted effectively as staff lead by example. Consistent reinforcement of ground rules, and the use of positive conflict resolution techniques, ensures children behave appropriately, showing consideration for each other at all times.

By celebrating children's achievements, whether academic, creative or social, staff help to promote children's confidence and self-esteem. Staff act as 'custodians' of the environment, thereby acting as excellent role-models for the children. As a result the children consistently complete the cycle of activity, ensuring the environment remains well-ordered throughout the session.

Montessori practice: classroom management

Strong leadership and excellent teamwork result in well-managed classrooms that meet the children's welfare and learning needs. In the infant/toddler rooms staff have established clear and consistent routines which provide security and familiarity for the children. The well-planned, orderly environment allows children to initiate their own activities, with adults providing excellent support when necessary. Children show concentration, motivation and perseverance as they repeat, complete and return activities to the shelves throughout the full two and a half to three hour work cycle.

Children are grouped by key person (for collating observations, learning journeys and planning) but in practice key workers will work across the whole class, not specifically just within their own key working group. Shifts are carefully planned to ensure ratios are correct throughout the day, with lunch hours staggered for the same purpose. Careful consideration is given to the role of the key person to ensure children see a familiar face when they arrive each day. Staff deployment, adjusted following the first accreditation visit, is excellent, ensuring adults are free to follow the children as they move around the school environment. As a result children's learning, well-being and safety are extremely well-supported.

All staff are responsible for maintaining the environment, with time allocated at the start and end of the day to ensure that each room is prepared and maintained to meet the children's needs. Adults are inconspicuous to most children, who continue uninterrupted in the freely chosen activities. Where interventions are necessary they are brief, focused and gentle. A range of strategies are used successfully to allow children to self-regulate group sizes, preventing too many children joining in with an activity. Staff work with children to repair equipment where appropriate and encourage respect of environment through completion of cycle of activity.

Montessori Practice: links with parents, including reports and records

The school works hard to create a true partnership with parents through well-established lines of communication, including an open door policy at the beginning and end of the day, regular newsletters and a well-maintained, informative website. Parents know their children's key person and are very pleased with the level and range of information they receive. Plans for the introduction of email communication, making it easier to maintain a two way dialogue with parents, are being developed. Parents contribute to their children's Learning Journeys, through observations from home and suggestions for future projects. There are also many opportunities for parents to become involved in the life of the school, through participation in activities, helping with outings and contributing to festival celebrations. Overall, links with parents are outstanding.

Staff maintain detailed records of children's learning and development, in the form of Learning Journeys, which are shared regularly with parents. A new computerized record keeping system is in the early stages of implementation and senior managers are continuing to monitor its effectiveness. Assessments are based upon detailed, planned observations carried out by key persons and supplemented by shorter, spontaneous observations to which all staff contribute. Parents are provided with regular detailed and informative reports, which effectively link areas of the Montessori curriculum, the EYFS curriculum and the Early Learning Goals. Annual

parents' evenings and other, less formal occasions provide an excellent opportunity for staff and parents to discuss children's progress and next steps.

Staffing:

Strong leadership is provided by the Head who delegates management responsibilities effectively through the use of Department Heads and delegation of curriculum responsibilities. Staff have individual job descriptions, and hold a range of appropriate qualifications, including three who are Montessori qualified and a further three who are currently undertaking Montessori courses. Overall, staff have a good understanding and appreciation of Montessori theory and practice.

Following the initial visit a new Teacher Induction Pack has been introduced, providing new members of staff and students with a detailed overview of Montessori philosophy and practice ensuring that every member of staff, whether Montessori qualified or not, has a sound understanding of the school's principles and has been fully inducted into the school's practices.

There is a strong commitment to ongoing professional development and staff regularly attend training provided by the Montessori Schools Association, Local Authority Early Years team and other independent trainers. This has allowed staff to gain a sound understanding of the links between Montessori and the EYFS. Recent training has had a very positive impact on the infant/toddler provision where changes have been made to the layout of the rooms and the range and availability of resources/activities. Children's freedom and independence have been enhanced as a result. Departmental and whole school staff meetings are held three or four times per year. These provide a good opportunity for all staff to contribute to the development of the setting and a more rigorous recording of minutes (introduced following the first accreditation visit) ensures discussions, decisions and action plans are clearly documented.

Staff appraisals, which include observations by senior staff, are regular (every six months) and thorough, identifying professional development targets which are often focused on Montessori practice and training. The response to the accreditation process, from all members of staff, has been extremely positive.

Chris Manville _____
Name of Assessor

05/07/11 _____
Date of report