

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.

The Meadows Montessori School

32 Larchcroft Road, Ipswich, Suffolk IP1 6AR

Date of previous MEAB accreditation: June 2012

Date of first re-accreditation visit: 24 June 2016

Date of second re-accreditation visit: 13 March 2017

This accreditation is valid until 31 July 2022

This accreditation report relates to the provision for children aged 4 to 12 years

Description of the school:

The Meadows Montessori School was established by its owner, the Principal, in 2008. It was previously located adjacent to its sister nursery, Willow Park, which is nearby. The school reregistered with the Department for Education and moved to its current premises in 2013. It is situated in a residential street within an urban area and has its own entrance driveway, with ample parking for staff and parents. The main building has two storeys. The ground floor consists of a large entrance hall and reception area. Two corridors lead off in opposite directions, one directly to the Reception/Year One mixed-age classroom (Dragonflies, 4 to 6 year olds) and the other to the Principal’s office and the after-school club room. Leading off this corridor are the two 6 to 9 year olds’

classrooms (Grasshoppers), art room, children's toilets, kitchen and cloakroom. The 9 to 12 year olds' area (Fireflies) is at one end of the first floor, with its own staircase. This area consists of a large L-shaped classroom and separate 'cultural room'. The rest of the first floor is accessed by another stairway at the other end of the building and comprises the SENCo room, meeting room, staff room and school library.

The Dragonflies room has direct access to its own outside classroom, which contains materials for construction, exploration and imaginative play organised on shelving units. To the rear is a spacious and separate single-storey building, which is used as the school hall. A large garden, with a rubber bark surface, a tepee, sensory garden and Forest School area with fire pit and logs, is situated at the rear of the school hall. There is also an enclosed tarmac playground area, where children can play ball games, construct dens with crates, planks and plastic tubing or sit at picnic tables.

The school opens from 08.00 to 18.00, Monday to Friday, for 38 weeks of the year; offering a breakfast club from 08.00 to 08.30, extracurricular clubs from 15.30 to 16.30 and an after-school club from 15.30 to 18.00. Only the core provision, during school hours of 08.30 to 15.30, is covered by this report.

The school is registered for 75 children, with a current age range of 4 to 11 years attending. There are 57 children on roll: all attend full-time with the exception of a few children who have not yet reached statutory school age. Healthy snacks and fresh water are available for the children in each classroom; they bring their own packed lunches.

Provision is made for children with additional needs under the guidance of a full-time Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities Coordinator (SENCo). The school employs 14 members of staff, of whom seven work part-time. Most members of the team, including the Principal and SENCo, hold Montessori qualifications covering the early years or primary levels. All other staff members hold appropriate early years or postgraduate teaching qualifications. There is a Deputy Head and Lead Teachers for both maths and literacy curriculums. On the day of the second re-accreditation visit 11 staff and 50 children attended.

Summary

The Meadows Montessori School is a haven of happy, industrious, independent children, who are given every opportunity to develop a thirst for, and love of, learning. The school is run by the very dedicated Principal who leads by example and who has remarkable energy and enthusiasm for the progression of the school and for the development of its teachers and children.

Children benefit from an excellently balanced curriculum that incorporates the ethos of the Montessori approach to learning alongside national curriculum expectations. Parents are extremely supportive of the school and an active 'parent family' helps raise funds and offers support to families.

Since the previous MEAB accreditation, staff have developed peer on peer review. This does not rely on formal recorded observations but is conducted as and when the need arises. It is now embedded in the staff team's daily practice and is a commendably flexible approach to reflective observation and constructive support. The school has undergone many changes since the previous MEAB accreditation and the enhancement of self-evaluation processes remains an action point on the school's development plan as an ongoing reminder of its commitment to improvement.

Since the first re-accreditation visit, staff have embarked on and/or completed further Montessori training. The Meadows Montessori School curriculum is now available for reference in each classroom. Senior Management, alongside the Lead Teachers for maths and literacy, have also developed a successful structure for scrutiny of staff performance and practice that feeds into further training across the school.

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:

- that teachers working with the primary age children, in Grasshopper and Fireflies, continue to add written reflections of the week's experiences into children's individual planning sheets.

Philosophy:

All staff members at The Meadows Montessori School believe that they have a duty to unlock the potential in each child so that children can achieve their best in every aspect of their lives whilst at the school, be it academically, socially, physically or spiritually. This ethos is documented in the school's aims. They intend that every child leaving the school will be well educated with a love of learning, friendly and self-confident, generous in spirit and ready to engage with a wider world to realise their talents and the contributions they can make.

The school provides a holistic approach to education, which fosters and develops a caring community in which everyone feels respected and valued. All staff members follow the Montessori principle of allowing the child to choose their activities and to work at their natural pace. The vertical age-grouping within the classes enables children to learn by observing and collaborating with peers and to value others' contribution to their own learning. The teachers allow the child to lead and they follow this lead in a supportive way. They understand their role in the environment and know they are there to guide and facilitate each child's individual learning. Staff members have an excellent grasp of Montessori philosophy, and it is obvious from all their interactions that this philosophy is at the heart of their practice; this shines through when they are with the

children. The school's philosophy is defined in writing in the parents prospectus and on the website. It is reviewed annually by the whole team and is considered regularly at staff meetings.

From the moment you walk into The Meadows Montessori School you are enveloped by the positive energy generated by staff and pupils; the Montessori ethos is fully embedded throughout this excellent school.

Learning and Development:

On Mondays the whole school meets for a twenty-minute assembly at 09.10. On other days the work cycle begins as soon as the children arrive. All classes have a three hour work cycle each morning, Monday through to Thursday. On Fridays the timetable is different, as the school is divided into only three mixed-age groups who all enjoy a range of activities such as Forest School, visiting the school's allotment, or exploring different religions and other topics included in the Personal, Social, Health Education (PSHE) and Citizenship curriculum. On Monday and Thursday Dragonflies have a second work cycle in the afternoon, with Montessori Great Lesson work on Tuesdays and physical education (P.E.) on Wednesdays. For the rest of the school the afternoons are spent between Great Lesson work and other enrichment subjects such as P.E., art, Young Engineers or French. Although all the children spend time outside each day, it is only the Dragonflies children that have free flow to their outdoor classroom during the work cycles.

Staff members plan the school's themes together at the start of each term to link activities with the Great Lessons. Medium and short term plans are drawn up within each class. In Dragonflies the children spontaneously choose work from their learning environments, including their outdoor classroom where additional activities based on their interests are provided. The teachers here meet weekly to plan for each child's learning outcomes in line with EYFS (Early Years Foundation Stage) requirements. In Dragonflies, planning is clearly set out in their Learning Journals by key objectives rather than sequential use of materials, and staff members use a web-based programme to record and assess each child's progress. This programme is used to link the EYFS with the Montessori curriculum and parents are given secure access to their child's records.

In Grasshoppers and Fireflies children follow their own Learning Journals which are updated weekly by staff and they also have weekly planning sheets, which serve as a home/school diary for recording progress with, for example, reading. The teachers also plan lessons they wish to deliver to small groups or individual children, and these may change as new interests are noted. For example, a child in Grasshoppers read a book on the Titanic and became so interested that tasks were planned for him around this topic: a scaled-down length of the ship was measured out in the corridor, portholes counted, volume calculated and a presentation was delivered to the whole school. Research also continued at home. In Fireflies the children are guided by subject area in their Journals

and choose appropriate materials from clearly defined areas of learning on the shelves. Assessment for these age groups is carried out using a computer-based tracking programme, onto which staff input observations that are used to link the child's progress with materials to National Curriculum Standards. Staff members have a good knowledge and understanding of the Montessori primary curriculum in order to plan effectively using this programme. A recommendation from the first re-accreditation visit was that the Montessori curriculum should be clearly documented for all staff to refer to. All classrooms now have a copy of The Meadows Montessori School curriculum available for reference, with the sequential order of Montessori materials and activities from age 4 to 11 years clearly indicated. This improvement has given all staff the support they need to plan successfully for children's progress.

Once a term all children above the EYFS have formal written assessments to monitor their progress. These are shared with parents and are included in the child's end of year written report. The learning and development provision is outstanding and fully supports each child's needs and interests.

Prepared Environment: resources and materials

Each classroom is laid out according to the Montessori areas of learning, with an excellent range of Montessori materials, supporting resources and extension exercises. Fireflies have a separate 'cultural room' with a wide range of high quality handmade materials to support all areas of the Montessori cultural curriculum and Great Lessons. The cultural material supporting Great Lesson research for the Grasshoppers classrooms is innovatively housed in the corridor between the two rooms, accessible to both classes and giving extra space in which to explore topics.

Staff and children take responsibility for their environment and all classrooms are referred to as 'our' classroom. Children have roles and responsibilities assigned to them through a rota system clearly displayed in the classrooms. They are given a sense of ownership for their environment, not just the classrooms but all the spaces they use. There are clear expectations that they tidy up after themselves and use the Hoover and duster to help maintain the classroom environments. Children are free to display their work on the walls if they choose to. This culture of freedom with responsibility nurtures the development of self-discipline and care for others. Children were observed in all classrooms putting their work away after they had finished, washing up after snack and helping each other find work off the shelves. The school operates a policy that if equipment is faulty or incomplete it is removed and either fixed, or replaced.

The Meadows Montessori School makes excellent use of the outdoor space available, using the different areas to their full advantage and enhancing provision for the children with well-chosen equipment and resources.

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

Independence is fully promoted at The Meadows Montessori School by allowing children the freedom to make choices for themselves. They set up snack each morning and are responsible for clearing it away afterwards. Staff members encourage them to do as much for themselves as possible. Children from Year Two (Grasshoppers) upwards use their Learning Journal to manage their own activities within the work cycles. This gives them the freedom to choose the order of their work and when they require to take a break or have snack. Children can choose where they sit in the classroom and know they have the right to work by themselves. They are invited to join small group lessons with a teacher but are not taken from other work in which they are absorbed. During the first re-accreditation visit a peripatetic music teacher observed that the child she was going to teach was engrossed in a task, so she waited for the child to finish before starting a conversation. A system is in place in all classrooms for children to be able to leave their room without asking permission. They place their name on a board to clearly indicate where they are going, such as to fetch materials from another classroom, or collect their work from the school's printer.

In Dragonflies children are given plenty of opportunities to try new activities. When they are ready, the teacher will discuss what they would like the child to do and if the child feels they are able then this is supported through the presentation of new materials. In Grasshoppers and Fireflies, previously unrepresented work is marked in the Journals with a 'P' indicating a group exercise or a new piece of work to be presented by the teacher.

Every year parents are invited to an information evening on 'being in a Montessori school' and how they can support their child at home. The website is used to share links to Montessori information clips, and to social media links for quotes and statements that inform parents of the wider Montessori world. Children will often be trusted to relay messages home or to remember to bring items in to school for projects such as for art or Young Engineers.

All children attend weekly class meetings, for which an agenda is drawn up. These give the children the opportunity to discuss any issues. Part of the structure of these meetings is that children are encouraged to resolve any conflict and agree a solution together. They are also encouraged to compliment each other. 'Peace tables' are also used in all the classrooms to help with minor upsets. Children are joined by a teacher at these in the lower years to support them to learn how to reach a resolution.

Using the weekly planning sheets, children are offered the chance to reflect on their work both in what they have achieved and are proud of, and where they may improve. These are shared with parents. A recommendation from the first re-accreditation visit was that the teachers should also add reflections of the child's week to substantiate these comments and offer support where the need for improvement has been identified. This process has started but is not yet embedded sufficiently across the whole school.

Montessori practice: classroom management

From Tuesday to Thursday the work cycle is 08.30 to 11.30. Children enjoy the mixed-age groups in their class, and each room has at least one teacher as well as support staff. The SENCo ensures the additional needs of all children can be met, including the needs of those who are gifted or talented. Time is allocated each half term for staff to review and improve the learning environment for the children, and this process continues as each term progresses, since staff members make regular adjustments to the learning provision in order to meet the changing needs and interests of the children. The expectation of the Principal is that the staff team maintains up to date records of the children in their class using the software provided. Some staff members choose to do this weekly, others half-termly. Every half term the Principal checks to ensure the electronic records are maintained effectively and to highlight children who may need extra support.

Examples of spontaneous activity, guided learning and children supporting each other in their learning were observed throughout the two Grasshoppers classes. During the first re-accreditation visit it was observed that there was a marked difference between these two classes in staff members' knowledge of the Montessori materials, both for supporting and extending learning. A recommendation was that, through scrutiny by the Lead Teachers and Senior Management, a programme for continuous professional development was identified to ensure consistency of practice across the classes. The Lead Teachers and Senior Management have made changes to ensure that this has been achieved. The individual teachers, who have worked incredibly hard to embed their Montessori knowledge and put this into practice in the classrooms, deserve particular recognition for their efforts. This has made a very positive difference to the whole school.

Staff members are aware of their roles and responsibilities within the school, with clear rota systems in place to cover lunchtime and playtimes. These are revisited regularly to ensure the cover matches the needs of the children. The distribution of adult support is very effective. The calm atmosphere of the classrooms, whilst at the same time being filled with a buzz of independent activity, demonstrates the excellent team work in every room as staff ensure the harmony within is managed and maintained extremely well.

Montessori Practice: links with parents, including reports and records

Every week a newsletter is emailed to parents, informing them of the coming week's events. In addition, emails and letters are sent out about trips, changes to the week's routines or as reminders. Parents may also receive emails from individual class teachers and can contact them directly if they have any concerns. Children and parents also use the children's Planners to communicate with class teachers.

The school offers families regular opportunities to come and observe the children at work and to learn about the Montessori method. Once a term parents can attend an open morning, during which they can visit all the classrooms and spend time with the children at work, and every Friday parents can come to an open assembly from 15.00 onwards, to join in with the songs and to round up the week together. Parents are also invited to a presentation evening, where the children present work on a chosen topic that they have produced with support from home. Parents evenings are held twice a year and, at the end of the summer term, the whole school works together to produce 'a play in a week', which parents agree is a highlight of the school year.

Parents receive two written reports, an interim one in the autumn term and a final yearly report which shows the child's attainment levels matched to the school's in-house Target Ladder. Parents are very happy with the information they receive from the school and with the assessment process which they feel gives the children, especially in Fireflies, the opportunity to experience 'testing' in a safe, loving environment, where they can focus on what they can do rather than on what they have yet to get right. The Target Ladder gives parents confidence that they can measure their child's progress against national norms whilst having the benefits of a comprehensive Montessori education for their children. The overwhelming impression is that the parents feel very much part of The Meadows Montessori School family and support each other in and outside of school. Their cohesion as a parent body is very impressive.

Staff: qualifications, deployment, and performance management

The Meadows Montessori School is led by an extremely dedicated Principal who works full-time on a supernumerary basis. She is therefore able to devote much of her time, assisted by the School Business Manager, to ensuring the smooth running of the school. She also regularly visits the sister setting, the nursery. The Principal, lead teachers and the business manager are members of the senior management team.

A comprehensive induction process is in place. Detailed job descriptions emphasise the Montessori ethos and practice. Minuted staff meetings are held at the beginning of each week, and at the end of each week staff are sent a memo outlining upcoming events.

The school has a comprehensive self-evaluation document and development plan based on Ofsted's Common Inspection Framework. Staff development opportunities include two supervisions and one appraisal each year, during which targets are set and training needs discussed. Regular staff observations are also carried out by senior staff, feedback is prompt, and support and targets for improvement are implemented quickly. For example, a teacher was given a target to improve the P.E. provision for their class, for which an outside agency was brought in for a term to build a skills base and increase staff members' confidence in this area of their provision.

Since the previous MEAB accreditation staff members have developed an ethos of informal peer on peer review, which further supports the development of their practice.

The Lead Teachers carry out scheduled scrutiny of the curriculum provision. After the first re-accreditation visit it was recommended that the results of this scrutiny were fed into staff members' continuous professional development (CPD) training plans if gaps in their knowledge and understanding of the full curriculum were identified. These Lead Teachers have worked hard to ensure that this is now happening. They have developed some innovative ideas to support staff across the school. They are enthusiastic about their role and the responsibility this gives them in ensuring an excellent and cohesive maths and literacy curriculum is delivered throughout the school. All statutory training is kept up to date and is above the levels required for First Aid and Food Hygiene. Training attended, including Montessori courses, is well documented.

Of the full-time members of staff, six hold relevant Montessori qualifications. Of the part-time staff, one holds a Montessori primary teaching qualification and two hold Montessori early years' qualifications. Four part-time members of staff are currently undertaking the Introduction to Montessori Practice (IMP) training.

Staff at The Meadows Montessori School present as a cohesive and excellent team, working together to constantly improve the provision for the children in their care. They draw on each other's strengths, they are happy to learn from each other and to reflect on their own practice. They are highly committed to promoting the Montessori approach and are keen to further their knowledge and experience.

Name of Assessor: Denys Lyne
Date report submitted: First visit – 27th June 2016
Second visit – 14th March 2017