

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.

Monique’s Montessori Day Nursery

41 Chipstead Lane, Chipstead, Sevenoaks, Kent TN13 2AJ

Date of previous MEAB accreditation: November 2013

Date of first reaccreditation visit: 5 June 2017

Date of second reaccreditation visit: 2 October 2017

This accreditation is valid until December 2021

This accreditation report relates to the provision for children aged from 3 months to 5 years

Description of the nursery:

Monique’s Montessori Day Nursery was established in 1989 and is privately owned. It is situated in a three storey, semi-detached house in a village on the outskirts of Sevenoaks. On the ground floor is a large L-shaped Montessori pre-school classroom for the 2½ to 5 year olds, along with an art room that also serves as a dining area and which has access to the garden. A conservatory is used as an entrance lobby and cloakroom, and there is also a kitchen on this floor. The first floor has a large room for the children aged 3 months to 2½ years, which is subdivided to provide a space suitable for those under 2 years old. On this floor there is also a small kitchen, baby changing facilities, a separate sleeping/resting room and an office. The second floor accommodates another office and staffroom, and is also used for storage. The large,

securely enclosed garden has two double garages, one contains a play fort and the other is set up as an outdoor classroom. There is also a shed which has a sandpit. A spacious area covered with artificial grass has a wooden play house, a wildlife pond and vegetable and flower patches.

The nursery offers full-time places between 07.30 and 18.30, Monday to Friday, for 51 weeks a year, with the option of a shorter day. The children attend a minimum of two sessions a week from 07.30 or 09.00 to 15.30. There are 51 children currently enrolled and up to 27 can attend at any one time. On the day of the second reaccreditation visit there were 22 present during the morning and afternoon, 16 stayed on after 15.30. Six of the children attending were under two, all aged one. Nine members of staff, including the chef and manager, were present until 15.30 and six stayed for the longer day. Breakfast, snacks, lunch and tea are provided. Lunch is cooked on site for all the children. The nursery provides for children for whom English is an additional language (EAL), and for those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).

There are 13 members of staff employed, 12 work directly with the children; nine work full-time. Seven hold Montessori diplomas including all those in the management team – the manager, the head of education and the two room leaders, one for each age range. These team members cover for each other's absence. The two owners, both qualified teachers, are not included in the rota but provide cover if required. Two members of staff, including the head of education, have early years degree qualifications and three others are qualified to level 3. The three members of staff who work with the under 2½ year olds are experienced and qualified to support this age group, the room leader also has an NNEB qualification.

Summary

Monique's Montessori Day Nursery demonstrates many areas of excellent practice and adheres closely to the principles of Montessori education. This is a well-equipped setting which offers the children an exciting environment in which to work and play. Both the indoor and outside facilities have been created with the needs of babies and young children in mind. While the outside area is predominately covered with artificial surface, care is taken to give the children contact with nature.

The children are trusted to initiate their own learning and the adults provide activities that are relevant, interesting and helpful to aid each child's development. A calm, purposeful atmosphere is evident and the children develop a strong sense of community.

Staff members have a broad range of experience; all are very supportive of the Montessori philosophy and are engaged in reflective practice to improve their own skills and the provision of the setting as a whole. The parents are very positive about the nursery and know that their children are settled. Following the first reaccreditation visit the management team has successfully guided and supported the staff team in making the recommended improvements in their practice, particularly in their links with parents, and Monique's Montessori Day Nursery has

continued to reflect on its high standards, as recommended at the previous MEAB accreditation.

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:

- the management team should consider offering staff members a broader range of online training opportunities and more whole team meetings; and
- the children over 2½ years old could be encouraged to wash up after all their meals, giving them further opportunity to carry out real tasks.

Philosophy:

Monique's Montessori Day Nursery provides a stimulating learning environment and a homely atmosphere; it offers an excellent range of materials that covers the Montessori curriculum and the learning and development areas of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). The aim of the nursery is to create a non-competitive environment that encourages concentration, independence and self-motivation, wherein children are able to work towards their full potential. Each child is treated as an individual; the holistic approach and broad provision cater for all children's learning and development needs. The organisation and daily routines fully promote the Montessori philosophy.

The younger children are grouped separately, which is appropriate for their needs. Across the whole setting there is a nurturing atmosphere as children are supported with care and sensitivity, and even the youngest children have freedom to choose their own activities. Those aged between 2½ and 5 benefit from working in their mixed age group, having the opportunity to learn from each other under the guidance of the knowledgeable staff, and being given a chance to take a guiding role themselves.

There is a clear explanation on the setting's website of the Montessori philosophy and method, and of how these complement the EYFS. New parents are given useful information before their children start. The comprehensive website also includes newsletters, relevant articles and details of local events. The management team meets three times a year to discuss the principles, aims and philosophy of the nursery. Teamwork is evident; staff members are kept informed of any changes and are provided with the opportunity to share good practice.

Learning and Development:

Each classroom is arranged into distinct areas of learning. In the under 2½ year olds' provision children are very well supported in their learning and development. The

organisation of the room and its furniture helps facilitate this. These very young children independently self-select resources that interest them and they are motivated to move freely around the space available. The varied curriculum is changed according to the observed needs and interests of the children attending. On the day of the first reaccreditation visit resources to support sensory exploration and heuristic play were easily available. The children follow their own routines by sleeping and eating when they need to. The adults model appropriate behaviour effectively and communicate very capably with these children, who clearly feel secure in their room. Their access to the garden is facilitated by the staff at various times each day.

The three hour work cycle in the morning for children over 2½ years works extremely well and is very beneficial for them as they have time to follow their own learning paths. The activities provided are both engaging and very varied. On the day of the first visit children were encouraged to use their counting skills well and the adults proved adept at asking open-ended questions to extend children's thinking. Science and maths were very well promoted. For example, one child was deeply involved in a science activity using vinegar and bicarbonate of soda to inflate a balloon and was able to repeat the exercise more than once. Another was also very absorbed whilst pouring beans into four separate containers; this required mathematical aptitude to sequence, divide and estimate, and also helped refine the child's fine motor control and concentration. The adults model positive social interaction frequently and skillfully, and their conversation is respectful. The children move around the rooms on the ground floor independently and are given a choice to go outside or stay in. They are able to work with resources that interest them individually, in small groups or with an adult, and they are given time to finish activities throughout the continuous work cycle; this freedom leads to genuine choice and sustained engagement.

All the children stay until at least 15.30 and are offered a varied curriculum in the afternoon. The babies and toddlers sleep in a first floor room and the older children who wish to sleep are given a mat and blanket in their main classroom after lunch. Those who are awake are able to go outside or use the art room. All additional activities such as French, music, drama, cookery and dancing take place after lunch and therefore do not interrupt the morning work cycle. The children are taken on outings frequently and visit the local library, park and lake. To support their project on transport the older children were recently taken on a bus ride.

The two room leaders are responsible for maintaining effective long and medium term planning. Short term planning is compiled by the key person for each child. Planning is relevant and kept up to date. Staff members record their observations of children's use of materials, linking the Montessori curriculum to the EYFS areas as they assess and plan for their progress. Each child has a Learning Journal containing further observations, photographs and assessment records; these are shared with parents every month. Each child's development levels are also assessed three times a year using a progress tracking program developed by the local authority, this information is also shared with parents. The current recording and assessment procedures are thorough but time-consuming.

Children with additional needs are very well provided for. Each has additional individual

planning and assessment drawn up for them, and any extra provision is managed by the SEND coordinator and implemented by the child's key person. These adults oversee any liaison with outside agencies, and training and support is sought as necessary. Some staff members have recently completed a Makaton course and now sign more of their songs for the children. Key phrases in a child's home language are used to support children with EAL. Following a recommendation from the first visit, written labels are now displayed in English to further promote reading and language comprehension for all the children. The team's enthusiastic adherence to the Montessori principles ensures that all the children make excellent progress in their learning and development.

Prepared Environment: resources and materials

Each of the children's rooms has open shelves which are kept in very good order and provide the children with clear choices. Resources throughout the setting are complete and well looked after by both the staff and the children. Both age ranges have their own snack area, which even the very young children can access when they choose, with guidance from the attentive adults. Outside, all areas of learning are provided for through the wide variety of materials and equipment made available daily. While the surfaces are man-made, the garden has a natural feel as there are plants covering the fences and growing in borders and pots. The insect hotel is an excellent resource for investigation and observation. There is also a tree, a pond and digging areas, along with ride-on toys, tyres, balls and a role-play house. One of the double garages has been imaginatively equipped with a fort for climbing on, a slide and a swing, which can be used in all weathers. The other garage is used as an outside classroom, with tables and chairs, resources for construction, as well as puzzles and other stimulating learning materials.

The main room on the first floor is divided into two areas. There is an open area with a soft chair and a range of heuristic materials to explore, and an area with shelving, tables and chairs. The low partition that separates these two areas allows staff to ensure that the children are offered provision suited to their needs and stage of development. The low open shelving in the second area gives these young children the opportunity to choose their resources and to learn how to complete a cycle of activity. The adults support them very well in their learning. There are both bought and homemade resources that meet their varied needs, and there are enough to engage all the children. The low furniture is arranged in such a way as to promote crawling, cruising and toddling, allowing children to move around easily to reach the materials of their choice.

The main classroom on the ground floor is set with an open carpeted area and an area with washable flooring that has tables and chairs, and which doubles as a dining area. There is a rich variety of learning materials which meet the children's needs and interests, with additional resources offered, such as a computer, that are developmentally appropriate for these older children. A nature area in the corner of the room has a tank for stick insects which the children can care for and observe. The resources in this room are clearly arranged into areas of learning and the adults model and encourage appropriate use of them. They are very well looked after by the children, who return materials to the shelves when they have finished working with them. There is

an excellent choice of where to work, as the children have an equal amount of table and floor space to use. The open shelving and low tables ensure that children can access and work with the materials easily. The quality of the resources is very good and some of the reading materials have been updated or replaced following the first reaccreditation visit.

These children also have the choice to work in the art room or outside during the morning work cycle. The entrance lobby/conservatory is used by the children to store their coats and boots. The art room is also used as the main dining area. It is divided into two parts, one with tables and chairs and the other with open space for activities such as construction play. Art materials are varied and the children are free to create their own art works. A second computer is housed just outside this room. The freedom that those over 2½ years old enjoy in using the ground floor and garden offers them an outstanding opportunity to pursue their own needs and interests whilst following the Montessori curriculum. The whole setting provides the children with a very well prepared learning environment.

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

In the provision for the children under 2½ years old there are many opportunities that enable them to develop their independence. For example, the adults give them the freedom to choose their own activities and encourage them to feed themselves and sleep and eat when they need to. Independence is also fostered through the respectful interaction between adults and children across the whole setting. All the classrooms and the outside area are arranged to support independent movement and choice, and the staff team is aware of the importance of helping children make decisions for themselves. It is clear that adults display high levels of trust towards the children with regards to their movement around their part of the setting and in their choices of activity. For their age, the children demonstrate excellent self-discipline and mutual respect.

The children on the ground floor enjoy their freedom of movement. Staff members are deployed where needed and a card system is used for children to indicate when they are going outside, so that staff can monitor and manage the numbers of children and staff in and outdoors. The art room is popular and the children can use it throughout the morning if they choose to. Their independence and sense of responsibility is further promoted through the allocation of class responsibilities.

Some older children prepare the tables for lunch in their main classroom and, following a recommendation made at the first reaccreditation visit, the time the children spend sitting in a circle group before lunch has been reduced. The organisation of mealtime routines is another outstanding feature of this day nursery. The very young children who are unable to wait for their lunch until noon are offered it earlier in their own area so that they can sleep after eating sooner if they need to, but the toddlers who can wait join their older friends downstairs. The children choose which table they sit at and who they sit with. They help themselves to their lunch, guided by an attentive adult. They pass the food around to their friends as well as pour their own drinks and then each table starts

eating together. This excellent practice ensures that the children are trusted to make their own choices and do not have to wait long to start eating. All children eat at their own pace and can request more food if they are still hungry. A member of staff sits at each table and eats with the children in order to guide the conversation and promote good table manners.

Snacks are available in both the classrooms during the morning. Breakfast is served in the art/dining room. Children help themselves to the breakfast cereals and feed themselves if able. While the children over 2½ years old wash up their crockery after snack, this already good practice could be extended to other meals, as child-level sinks are available.

At drop-off and collection times the key person will discuss anything of note to share with the child's parent or guardian. The Learning Journal includes ideas of how to foster the child's independence, which helps promote a consistent approach between nursery and home. The independence that the children enjoy and the trust that staff members show towards the children are outstanding features of this setting.

Montessori Practice: links with parents, including reports and records

Incidental observations are recorded by any member of staff, but each child's key person has responsibility for maintaining the records of observations of them, planning for their next steps and updating their Learning Journal record, which is sent home for their parents to contribute to. These arrangements work effectively to provide continuity of care and the monitoring of each child's development. A 'buddy' system is in operation should a key person be absent. Parents are invited to share information about their children when they first start at the setting. The completion of the mandatory two year old progress check is the responsibility of child's key person. This covers the EYFS's three prime areas of learning and development and is also shared with parents. A comprehensive transition report is sent to the next school and is written as a summary of the child's progress in each EYFS area of learning and development.

Staff members work hard to promote effective partnership with parents. The nursery operates an open door policy and offers regular verbal and written communications. Following the first reaccreditation visit additional strategies have been put in place to improve parental attendance at parent meetings and to encourage their input into their child's Learning Journal, so that staff and families can discuss and share knowledge of children's progress and care even more effectively. Parent meetings are now to be set at a time chosen by the parents, and the management team now invites a written commitment from parents to attend meetings. The children under 1 year of age have a contact book which goes home every day. This means of communication is also in place for those who attend other settings as well. As the children can be at the nursery for full days it was recommended at the first visit that 'family books' were introduced for all the children, especially for the babies and toddlers. These have been introduced and give them a meaningful reminder of home.

A noticeboard, emails, newsletters and website updates also keep parents informed and

include information on the Montessori approach and activities for home learning. Montessori literature is also available to borrow. The parents report that they are delighted with the high quality of the service offered to them. Their feedback about the nursery is excellent, with praise being given regarding its Montessori ethos.

Staff: qualifications, deployment, and performance management

The manager has overall responsibility for the nursery and is very well supported by the rest of the management team. The owners have some contact with the setting to help the manager and staff. Senior staff recognise team members' individual skills and the running of the classes is delegated to the room leaders, such as the responsibility for ensuring that their rooms are suitably prepared each day.

Following a recommendation made at the first reaccreditation visit, photographs of the staff team, with a description of each person's roles and responsibilities, are now displayed in the entrance lobby so parents and visitors know which member of staff is the most relevant to speak to should they need to. All displays are also now more up to date and clearly visible.

Staff members benefit from clear and relevant job descriptions, which refer to the Montessori approach, and a supportive induction procedure. Peer on peer written observations feed into the annual appraisal and supervision process, which together provide informative and comprehensive opportunities for self-evaluation. The setting's improvement plans also aid reflection on practice. The management team is able to monitor the performance of staff members, and has a robust system in place to also keep track of children's progress. Teamwork is strong and staff members collaborate well.

The contents of the whole team meetings are outlined in writing; however, these only occur three times a year and room meetings are also infrequent. While opportunities for continuing professional development (CPD) are offered, such as attendance at Montessori conferences and local authority training, having whole setting training days would provide further opportunity for the team to meet together more regularly. An inset day has been scheduled. It is also recommended that the management team considers offering staff a broader range of online training options, to give them more flexible choice and access to CPD.

The excellent Montessori practice in evidence at Monique's Montessori Day Nursery is driven by the whole team. The culture of self-reflective practice helps to ensure that staff members continue to adapt the learning environment and their approach, to provide the best outcomes for the children in their care.

Name of Assessor: Charlotte White

Date report submitted: First visit – 7th June 2017
Second visit – 3rd October 2017