

## **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 Norwich Montessori School**

The Colney Parish Room, Old Watton Road, Norwich, Norfolk NR4 7TW

Date of previous MEAB accreditation: December 2013

Date of first re-accreditation visit: 4 November 2016

Date of second re-accreditation visit: 2 March 2017

This accreditation is valid until 31 July 2021

This accreditation report relates to the provision for children aged 2½ to 5 years

#### **Description of the nursery:**

The Norwich Montessori School was first established in 1985 and is situated in the village of Colney, which is approximately two miles from Norwich city centre. The provision was re-registered under the current ownership in 2007 and has sole use of its lobby, large classroom and garden, kitchen, office and cloakroom facilities. The setting operates term times only, offering morning sessions Monday to Friday from 08.45 to 12.15. Afternoon sessions are offered Monday to Thursday up to 15.30. Packed lunches are provided by parents.

Currently there are 35 children on roll. The nursery is able to support children with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), with special dietary requirements

and those who speak English as an additional language (EAL).

The proprietor manages the setting and works full-time along with three members of staff; two other members of staff attend part-time. The proprietor and another full-time staff member hold Montessori diplomas and other level 6 qualifications. Two more of the team are Montessori qualified.

On the day of the second re-accreditation visit there were 24 children attending during the morning session, with all six staff. Fourteen children stayed for lunch and ten remained for the afternoon, along with four members of staff.

## Summary

The Norwich Montessori School provides a spacious and welcoming Montessori early years environment which is carefully prepared by the adults and which the children can explore freely. All members of staff are enthusiastic Montessori practitioners and the proprietor encourages their continued reflection on their practice in order to fully support young children's development and to offer a calm and child-centered approach to learning.

Following the recommendations from the previous MEAB accreditation all members of staff have helped extend the learning programme to the outdoor area, which now provides a wide range of activities for the children. During the long daily work cycles the children have plenty of opportunities to engage in self-initiated activities indoors and outside. In addition, the child's individual needs, interests and progress are now observed, noted and assessed by their key person using a secure web-based recording system, which links the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) and Montessori areas of learning. Following the recommendations from the first re-accreditation visit all members of staff have been reviewing their way of using this online system in order to assess the quality of teaching and the children's progress more effectively. However, this requires further consideration in order to establish more consistency across the team's practice and more depth in recording observations, assessments and planning.

Parents give very positive feedback about the daily communication they have with their child's key person and about the advantages of keeping up to date with their child's learning through their access to the web-based system. However, it would enhance practice further if the child's key person and parents planned the child's next steps more closely together in order to achieve consistency between nursery and home in the support offered for the child's learning and development.

***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:**

- continue to carry out more detailed observations using the web-based tracking system, in order to be able to assess children's learning more fully;
- continue to plan and evaluate activities using the web-based system and so support each child's next steps effectively; and
- extend partnership work with parents by the child's key person conducting the mandatory two year old progress check with them, as well as planning the child's next steps together with parents during consultations.

**Philosophy:**

The Norwich Montessori School's philosophy fully promotes the Montessori approach and is documented clearly, including on its website. The setting aims to nurture every child's inner drive and abilities, to help them learn with confidence and to provide fully for their development and well-being. It reviews its principles, aims and philosophy regularly.

The environment is carefully prepared by all members of staff. It encourages the mixed age group of children to select activities independently and gives children the freedom to move between the indoor and outdoor areas. The children confidently choose resources and engage in many cycles of activity individually, in pairs or in a group, during the daily work cycles that run for at least three hours, morning and afternoon.

All members of staff understand their role of respecting the children's inner needs and of supporting learning through child-initiated activity. If a child chooses an activity beyond their current capability the adult allows the child to continue their exploration and then offers an alternative which the child will find more achievable and therefore may enjoy more. Staff members provide positive role models by being calm and attentive. During both re-accreditation visits there were a few children settling-in and their key person was guiding them very patiently, following their needs and individual interests. Staff members respect the children by bending down to their height level and making eye contact while talking with them. This gentle and child-centred approach creates trust between the adult and child.

During the first visit a child was exploring the Montessori dressing frame with poppers. At first the child was undoing the poppers, shouting "I did it! I did it!" to the adult nearby on achieving this task. When the adult responded with positive encouragement the child started doing the poppers up, needing some assistance at first. The child again expressed delight in achieving the task and repeated this activity to master it. The children are very well supported and the nursery's adherence to the Montessori philosophy is outstanding.

## **Learning and Development:**

The nursery offers a wide variety of learning opportunities both indoors and outside. The children have easy and free-flow access to the large garden, where their opportunities for learning are an extension of, and a complement to, those indoors. For example, during the second visit the children were invited to participate in the story-telling of 'Goldilocks and the Three Bears', using finger puppets. This activity was then extended to the outdoor learning environment to encourage the children to use natural resources such as mud to make the 'porridge', with pots, saucers, wood and leaves to create the other props for the story. The children are also encouraged to take a story, rhyme, alphabet letter and object of their choice home on a weekly basis in order to support their literacy skills beyond the setting.

Each child is allocated a key person when they start at the setting, which helps them to become confident in communicating their needs and to develop a trusting relationship from the outset. All children are comfortable approaching their key person. During both re-accreditation visits the children were confidently asking their key person for help, or if they wanted to explore the outdoor space or join in with other children's activities. The key person observes and notes their child's interests and chosen activities on the password protected web-based recording system. This information is then used to assess the child's progress according to the EYFS and Montessori areas of learning. Following a recommendation made at the previous MEAB accreditation, the setting has adopted an online system in order to be able to assess children's learning and the quality of teaching. Since the first visit all members of staff have explored ways of improving their planning, record-keeping and assessment. However, they now need to enhance their knowledge and understanding of how to make best use of the system to observe, record and assess both the children's progress and the effectiveness of the learning provision. This improvement will enable the team to support and extend children's learning confidently and consistently.

Each term all members of staff plan a topic together, taking into account the children's interests and any upcoming festivals or events. These topics are presented alongside, and include the use of, Montessori materials. During the second visit the children were celebrating World Book Day, they had dressed up as their favourite story character and each had brought their favourite book in. They were also making Welsh cakes in a small group activity, as part of celebrating St. David's Day. Additional activities such as drama, music and movement are offered to the children once a week on allocated days and are carried out by specialist teachers. The setting also takes the children on termly local field trips, such as visits to Norwich Cathedral or for forest walks.

One member of staff is the SENCo and regular staff meetings are held to discuss any concerns or additional SEND and EAL needs that arise, in order to be able to plan effectively for the child's next steps and to fully support them and their families. This support is evident through well-documented procedures and effective multi-agency work with the local authority or health specialists such as speech therapists.

All members of staff place strong emphasis on their child-centred approach and show dedication to improving their planning, record-keeping and assessment in order to be

able to fully support the children's learning and development.

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

The Norwich Montessori School's wide range of resources, including Montessori materials, fully supports children's learning and exploration. The resources are laid out at the child's level, mostly on shelving, in an orderly manner. They are of very good quality and are easily accessible to the children. All members of staff maintain the environment very well throughout the day. The classroom is divided into the Montessori areas of learning, with additional activity stations for art and craft, book reading and role-play. There is a dedicated snack and washing-up area for the children, where they prepare food, eat lunch and carry out cookery activities with the adults. The learning materials are carefully selected by all members of staff according to the children's ages and stages of development. Some of the activities and learning materials had been re-arranged between the first and second re-accreditation visits in order to accommodate children's observed changing needs.

Following the previous MEAB accreditation's recommendation all members of staff have been involved in enhancing the garden provision in order to extend children's learning outdoors, and this has been identified by the setting as an area for continued development. The outdoor prepared environment now offers opportunities for children to learn through close contact with nature and differentiated areas encourage sensory exploration, such as in the mud kitchen, clay, sand and water play. In addition, all members of staff, helped by the children, have created a pond in a gated area in order to be able to observe the life-cycles of insects and frogs. The children also learn about recycling through, for example, using the compost heap for food waste. There are areas for construction play, using logs and wooden blocks, and activities that encourage large motor skills such as digging, climbing, balancing and riding on tricycles.

The children are encouraged to learn how to take responsibility for the care of their learning environment and they help look after the nursery's pet fish. During the first re-accreditation visit one of the oldest children confidently showed a visitor around, explaining each area of the classroom and outdoors, including their personal favourites. Staff at The Norwich Montessori School work extremely well together to create a very rich learning environment for the children.

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

The well-established daily routine enables children to become independent within their prepared environment. When they arrive they place their coats on their pegs and change from their outdoor shoes into slippers. On entering the classroom they are able to choose their own activities straight away. They have excellent opportunities to develop independence and confidence at their own pace. Staff members respect the children's choices and engage with them when help is needed or to extend their learning and development. The children have the freedom to work alone or in groups, and are

encouraged to respect each other's workspace by using floor or table mats for their chosen activities.

The children independently prepare the fruit and vegetables for their snack, with an adult showing them how to cut food with a knife safely. They also help staff during the lunchtime routine and use china crockery, cutlery and glasses. It would enhance practice even more if the children were involved in the setting of the tables, rather than the adults doing so for the children. The children wash up their crockery after use.

The adults guide the children with ground rules and through modelling good manners. . They listen to the children carefully, encourage them to express themselves and promote positive social interaction and respect for others very capably. They are excellent role models. The children happily help each other and are keen to share their achievements. They are learning to celebrate each other's cultures and differences.

Staff members use a variety of means to communicate to parents the importance of helping children do things for and by themselves, these include meetings, literature and through the online system. Parents comment on their children becoming more confident and independent during their time at the nursery, and how they continue to encourage these skills with their child at home.

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

The written policies and procedures are available for parents to read in the setting and on the website. This information includes explanation of how the Montessori philosophy is incorporated into the nursery's ethos and daily practice. Before the child starts attending parents fill in a registration form to inform staff about their child's routine at home and about any particular needs.

The key persons discuss children's progress with their parents each day and parents can access the web-based 'Parent site' by using a secure password. This site is used to share evidence of the child's progress, including weekly observations, and offers excellent opportunity for two-way communication between nursery and home. Newsletters and any changes at the setting are also communicated to parents using this site. All the members of staff acknowledge the importance of working in partnership with parents. The nursery has an 'open door' policy; parents book consultation meetings to discuss their child's progress with the key person and can attend to observe the daily routine in order to gain deeper insight into the approach and practices offered. However, it would enhance practice further if the mandatory two year old progress check, which is based on observations carried out by the child's key person, was shared more fully with parents. This could be completed in collaboration with the parents and children's next steps could also be planned together during consultation meetings. Annual reports are prepared for all the children, which cover their progress with the EYFS and Montessori curriculum. Transition reports are prepared when the child leaves the setting. All reports are shared digitally with parents.

Parents have opportunities to participate in fundraising events and annual celebrations

at the nursery. During both re-accreditation visits parents commented very positively on the team's professional approach to the children's learning and the calm atmosphere at The Norwich Montessori School. They appreciate the benefits of accessing the web-based 'Parent site' and the verbal feedback that they receive.

### **Staff: qualifications, deployment, and performance management**

The team is well-managed, all members of staff are aware of their roles and responsibilities in the classroom and throughout the daily routines. They follow classroom procedures diligently and carry out daily checks that are well documented. The children's dietary needs are also recorded clearly.

Staff members are well-qualified. The proprietor holds a Montessori International Diploma and a BA (Hons) in Early Childhood Studies. Another member of the team has a Montessori Diploma and Qualified Teacher Status and all but one have childcare qualifications.

The thorough induction programme is conducted by the proprietor and covers Montessori practices. Detailed written policies, procedures and job descriptions are provided to all staff. Termly supervision meetings give members of staff the opportunity to discuss any concerns or challenges in their practice. Staff meetings are held once a month and minutes of these are documented. Appraisals are held every six months with the proprietor. All members of the team attend in-house Montessori training, courses offered through the local authority, and the Montessori Schools Association's regional meetings and workshops.

All members of staff seek to gain knowledge and understanding of how to develop reflective practice. Following a recommendation made at the first re-accreditation visit, the team has implemented peer observations in order to further support staff members' performance and inform their continued professional development. These observations are recorded and discussed during staff and supervision meetings. The team regularly evaluates and develops its practice to ensure that all members of staff have a shared understanding and commitment to the Montessori ethos of the setting and to ensure that they provide the best learning opportunities for the children attending The Norwich Montessori School.

Name of Assessor: Andrea Dalling

Date report submitted: First visit – 8<sup>th</sup> November 2016

Second visit – 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2017