



# **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” (2012) and subsequent revisions. The second visit sought to assess the progress made on the recommendations set out in the report from the first visit as well as 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.

### **Rectory Garden Montessori School**

Old Church Road, Melton, Woodbridge, Suffolk IP13 6DH

Date of the first re-accreditation visit: 1 May 2014

Date of the second re-accreditation visit: 25 September 2014

Date of previous MEAB accreditation: June 2011

This accreditation report relates to the provision for children aged 2 to 5 years old

#### **Description of the school:**

Rectory Garden Montessori School is located just outside a small village in East Suffolk. The nursery is situated in a building that was formerly a potting shed and has now been redesigned for its current purpose. It comprises one large classroom, entrance hall, office/toddler room and a kitchen. There are three children’s toilets and one disabled/adult facility. There are resources for any child to have a rest as and when needed, and in the toddler room there is a cot and a number of day beds. Assessment of the toddler unit is not included in this report as it has only recently opened; it operates part time for children under two years of age. The nursery has an outdoor area, with cultivated and wild spaces augmented with appropriate play equipment.

The nursery operates during school term times and offers morning and afternoon sessions of three and a half hours. There is also a 45 minute after-school session available on three days a week, for the children who attend in the afternoons. The nursery is open from 08.30 to 15.30 and children attend either morning or afternoon sessions, or all day. Those children who stay to lunch bring a lunch box from home. There are 26 places for 2 to 5 year olds. At the second visit there were four staff present all day, with 17 children in the morning and 10 in the afternoon.

The nursery first opened in January 2010 and is privately owned. The staff are well qualified holding early years degrees as well as having Montessori qualifications. All staff work part time, whilst one member works four and a half days. There is provision for children with additional needs such as special educational needs, disabilities and English as an additional language.



## Summary

Rectory Garden Montessori offers its pupils an excellent Montessori learning experience, which is provided by a team of caring, qualified staff who work in a well prepared environment. All the children are very independent. Since the nursery's last accreditation the staff have changed the lunch procedure, and this has given the children greater opportunity to contribute to the lunch time routine.

The work cycles offered are used most effectively, and the children have many learning opportunities both inside and outside the classroom. The staff 'follow the child', in their efforts to meet children's individual developmental needs. There is a very good range of resources for the children to use. Independence is encouraged in every aspect of the nursery's routine, and the children have freedom within the prepared environment at all times.

The links between the nursery and the parents are very positive and much appreciated by the parent body. The excellent qualifications of the staff mean that they have a sound understanding of the Montessori ethos and philosophy, this skilled staff team provides a most positive start to a child's early education.

Since the first re-accreditation visit the nursery has made significant strides to introduce a much wider range of practical life activities which focus particularly on the needs of the younger child. Also, the stimulating outdoor environment reflects areas of the curriculum which are offered indoors. Since the first visit, the nursery has produced more written planning records, but it is recommended that these should be more detailed to cover the medium term.

***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 nursery should provide written plans at the beginning of each term.
- The nursery should continue to closely monitor the condition and completeness of all the materials.

### **Philosophy:**

Rectory Garden Montessori School aims to 'follow the child' in every aspect of the day to day organization of the nursery. The children have many opportunities to be independent individuals from the minute they arrive in the morning, until they prepare to go home at the end of the session. It is very evident that the quality of the provision follows the core principles of the Montessori approach. The child's unique potential is clearly being achieved, and even the youngest develop self-initiated learning and have very good levels of self-discipline. The second re-accreditation visit was at the start of the autumn term and so all the 4 year olds had moved on to school; however there were still many positive examples of the 3 year olds developing their self-initiated learning, and being confident role models for the increased numbers of 2 year



olds.

Parents are made aware of the elements of a Montessori education from the very comprehensive welcome pack and prospectus. Due to the high percentage of Montessori qualified teaching staff, all the adults in the environment have a deep understanding of the Montessori principles. Since the first visit, the nursery has produced a very comprehensive mission statement which fully encapsulates the true Montessori ethos of the nursery.

### **Learning and Development:**

All areas of learning of the Montessori curriculum, in partnership with those of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), are adequately catered for and supported by the provision of appropriate materials. There is free flow from the classroom to the outdoor environment for all children throughout each session. The variety of activities available in the garden cover most of the areas of learning and each child has the opportunity to engage in creative activities, either in small groups or as part of a larger team. This was evident at the first re-accreditation visit as they organized plastic crates into a train and nominated a driver who was sent off to find a 'steering wheel'. It was said that the train could not possibly go anywhere without one. Large scale building also took place in another area, and four children were carrying out scientific investigations in the water tray with funnels, hoses and a variety of marine models. As it was 'mini-beasts week', it would have been preferable to plan for more bug related activities outside, whereby the indoor Montessori cultural area could have been better reflected in activities out of doors.

During the second re-accreditation visit the focus was on different habitats, and the children were studying deserts. The nursery had provided additional resources for this topic which the children enjoyed using. Natural history materials made by the staff for other themes were extremely popular with all the children, with one 3 year old moving from one activity to the next. Although she was unable to read the names of the butterflies and gem stones available, she could recognize the shapes of these words.

During both re-accreditation visits the morning work cycle lasted over three hours, and the afternoon extended to two and a half hours after lunch. There was a good mix of adult-led activities and spontaneous learning, such as the use of magnifying glasses and model bugs at the interest table in the middle of the classroom. The developmental needs of all the children are the focus of the activities on offer.

Each staff member takes their turn to plan topic activities for a week at a time, and this seems to be very successful, with a spider chart on the classroom wall to remind all the staff of the aims of the week. It is recommended that staff produce plans for longer periods and link indoor planning with some of the outdoor activities and resources. The children are continually assessed by their key persons, who keep meticulous records of the child's learning journey. The staff work hard to ensure that the needs of their key children are being fulfilled and their learning extended. The nursery undertakes the mandatory two year old assessments in the first three to six months after a child's second birthday, depending on when the child joins the setting and how often s/he attends.

The team constantly monitors the effectiveness of their planning, and how it affects the provision for learning and development. The adults wholeheartedly support the children in their use of all



the learning environments this nursery has to offer. If any of the pupils have specific needs, the staff provide appropriate materials and expertise as necessary.

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

The nursery is divided into the Montessori areas of the curriculum, with a good range of resources for each area. The Montessori materials are supplemented with other equipment, ensuring that each child has the opportunity to follow their particular interests in full. As a follow-up to one of the planned week's activities on space, in which the children had shown a particular interest, there were books, puzzles and games to extend this investigation.

Since the first re-accreditation visit the addition of a number of new practical life activities has satisfied the needs of the 2 year olds, of whom there is a high percentage as it is the start of the new school year.

All the resources are at child level and easily accessible. There are several good sized tables and a large enough area for children to work individually, or in groups, using mats on the floor. A good quantity of resources ensures there are plenty of materials for all the children. The outdoor environment contains a good range of large and smaller equipment, which could be used by children working on their own or in small and large groups, such as a pile of crates and a wide selection of wooden building materials. It was recommended at the first re-accreditation visit that a wider range of cultural and language materials for specific use in the outdoor environment was provided. During the second visit, it was observed that there had been a definite increase, with a wider range of cultural and language materials available outdoors.

All the adults are involved in the preparation and maintenance of the rooms and the outdoors area on a daily basis, ensuring the materials are always accessible and ready for use. The staff should continue to be extra vigilant when checking some of the materials, to ensure that each exercise is complete and in good condition.

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

The independence of each child in the nursery stands out from the minute the child is welcomed at the door. During the first re-accreditation visit, as soon as the children had exchanged their good morning greeting, they immediately took themselves off to their pegs, hung up their coats, put their bags in the appropriate area and, if they had a lunch bag, this was stowed on the correct trolley. Within five minutes of their arrival, each child had selected their activity, chosen their work space, and in some cases, asked a friend to join them; they then were immediately immersed in the work cycle. The snack is put out on a table from 9.30, and there is space for a small group of children to take their healthy refreshment together. There was no queuing at any time and the children sat at the table as a space became available, selected their food, socialized with their friends and when they had finished eating they took their dish to a bowl and washed it up.



At all times, during the two sessions of the day, the children had the freedom to move around the nursery, choose how to work, either individually or in a group, and to decide whether to work indoors or outdoors. Some of the children repeated certain exercises several times and then happily returned them to the shelves. The children frequently accessed their activities spontaneously, sometimes after watching fellow pupils working with a specific exercise. During the second visit there were several examples of the older 3 year olds offering help to the younger children. A group gathered around a table was making snakes out of strips of paper, gluing them into chains. One 2 year old sat down at the table and said she needed help, immediately a 3 year old girl said "I can show you, look, this is how you do it." She then demonstrated making one and told the younger child that she could now try one for herself. The little girl managed to make her chain, and the older child was proud of her companion's success.

Parents are very supportive of the work carried out in the nursery, particularly with regard to the individual independence exercised by their child at the nursery. They seek to carry on these activities at home, for example in the provision of child-sized jugs for pouring their own drinks, and pegs at their child's height. The children show respect for each other, their environment, and for their teachers, who all provide excellent role models.

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### **Montessori practice: Classroom management**

The learning in the Rectory Garden Montessori School is a mixture of planned and spontaneous activities, but always emphasizes the importance of 'following the child'. Each week a different



member of staff plans a weekly topic, matching the contents to each area of learning of the EYFS and Montessori curriculum. There still needs to be more specific planning to link to the outdoor environment.

The work cycles of just over three hours in the morning and two and a half hours in the afternoon are very effective and followed by all the children and staff. Each staff member knows their specific responsibilities and duties, such as lunch preparation, undertaken on rotation. The manager ensures that all the duties are carried out efficiently on a daily basis and she is responsible for the daily checks; in her absence these checks are carried out by the proprietor.

The outdoors area is well supervised, and this is managed seamlessly with staff moving from one environment to another as and when the need arises. Children who need to be introduced to activities are well catered for; all staff members watch vigilantly for the needs of each individual child and ensure these are always met. Although the staff are part time, great attention is paid to ensuring that there is a high standard of continuity of care, with children's attendance well matched with their key workers' to ensure this is so. The nursery is vertically grouped, with children aged 2 to 5 working together. Children can sleep or rest when they wish at any time during the day.

The nursery has comprehensive policies in place and these are available for the parents on the website. There are copies in a file in the entrance hall, and the important ones are included in the new parents' welcome pack. There are three additional activities which take place, one on each of the three days in the 45 minute after-school provision. These involve drama, football and craft.

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

Each child is allocated a key person when they join the nursery, and the key person is responsible for keeping the child's records and observations, and completing the Learning Journey Profile for that child. Other members of staff also have contact with the child: they carry out observations and presentations and these are communicated to the key person.

Rectory Garden Montessori has excellent links with the children's parents. Once a new pupil has registered, the parent/carer receives a very comprehensive welcome pack and a copy of the prospectus. In the prospectus there is a good explanation of the Montessori method of education, describing each of the areas of learning. The parents receive a newsletter twice a term. There are two parent-teacher sessions during the year when the child's key person meets with the parent/carer to exchange verbal feedback on the progress of their child. Each family receives a termly written report.

When a child leaves the nursery a written report is shared with the parents and also sent to the child's new school. The staff also visit the school in the autumn term, taking the child's Learning Journey with them.

The well written mission statement provides useful information for the parents to share with others who are interested in the Montessori approach.

**Staffing:**

The proprietor works in the nursery part time and she is ably supported by an excellent manager. The staff work as a most effective team, always putting the needs of the children first. The nursery has a developmental plan in accordance with the Ofsted requirement of self-evaluation.

Of the eight staff including the proprietor/head teacher, seven have a Montessori qualification, with one member completing teaching practice as part of their training. Two have Early Years Professional Status, and one has an early years degree with honours. The proprietor also has an early years degree. All the staff are part time, whilst one member works four and a half days.

There is good empathy between the whole team, and this is proving to be particularly beneficial to every child. There is a low turnover of staff, but when a new member joins they have an induction period and are allocated a mentor. There are job descriptions for the teaching staff, and the proprietor and manager carry out regular staff observations before annual appraisals. Regular staff meetings take place and these are minuted. All staff members have undertaken continued professional development (CPD) training with the local authority.

Name of Assessor: Wendy E S Compson

Date of reports: First visit – May 1<sup>st</sup> 2014

Second visit – September 25<sup>th</sup> 2014