



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" (2012/14). 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.

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.

Willow Park Montessori Day Nursery

316 Tuddenham Road, Ipswich, Suffolk IP4 3QJ

Date of previous MEAB accreditation: June 2012

Date of first re-accreditation visit: 8 February 2016

Date of second re-accreditation visit 1 June 2016

This accreditation is valid until 31 December 2021

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

Description of the nursery:

Willow Park Montessori Day Nursery was first registered in 2002. One of the two owners is Montessori qualified and is the head teacher of the sister setting, a Montessori primary school located nearby, the other works at Willow Park.

The premises, set on the outskirts of Ipswich, consist of two single-storey buildings, an outside area and car parking facilities, with a fenced walkway from the car park to the



nursery. One of the buildings houses the baby unit, for children aged 3 months to 2 years, and the other has two classrooms: one for toddlers aged 2 to 3 years, and one for pre-school children aged 3 to 5 years. There is also an office, staff room, kitchen and cloakroom areas. Both buildings open onto the outside area comprising a patio, a large area covered with bark as well as areas protected from the elements and a garden with plants.

The nursery opens Monday to Friday from 08:00 to 18:00 for 51 weeks of the year. Children attend for a variety of half or full day sessions. A maximum of 54 children may attend the nursery at any one time and there are currently 97 on role who are aged between 3 months and 5 years old. The nursery supports children with additional needs and/or disabilities, including children with English as an additional or joint language. Breakfast, healthy snacks and a freshly cooked hot lunch and tea are provided every day.

On the day of the second visit 11 children under 2 years and 20 over 2 years were present in the morning. Ten under 2 years and 19 over 2 years stayed on for the afternoon. The nursery employs 24 members of staff who work directly with the children, the majority of whom are full-time. Two of these, including the manager, are Montessori qualified and most hold early years qualifications at level 3 or above. A cook, administrator and other support staff are also employed.

Summary

Willow Park Montessori Day Nursery provides a very caring learning environment. It operates in an efficient, organised manner and is led by a highly experienced and well qualified management team.

The children in the nursery are independent, happy, respectful and fully embrace the rich learning experiences they are offered. A particular feature of this nursery is that the outdoor classroom area receives as much consideration as the indoor rooms, with specific staff being given responsibility for outdoor observations, planning and provision. Children across the age range have the freedom to access the outdoors on numerous occasions throughout the day.

Staff members work as a cohesive team and have a respectful, professional relationship with the families of the children in their care. Parents report that they are extremely happy with the communication they receive from the nursery. They feel it is a strong partnership and report that they are very well supported in the upbringing and care of their children.

Since the previous MEAB accreditation the nursery has implemented a staff peer on peer observation and review process, to enhance reflective practice. This has now been fully embedded and is an important part of the self-evaluative approach of the setting.



The school provides an education in accordance with the principles of the Montessori approach and environment and merits accreditation by the Montessori Evaluation and Accreditation Board.

- It is recommended that the school continues to reflect on its practice, including recently improved aspects such as its record-keeping and staff induction process, in order to ensure that high standards are maintained.

Philosophy:

Willow Park Montessori Day Nursery's mission statement promotes the philosophy of Maria Montessori. The nursery aims to inspire the holistic development of individual children in a safe and supportive environment in which an integrated approach to learning and living is fostered. All staff members understand and embrace the Montessori philosophy putting the child at the centre of their practice, so helping the children to fulfil their unique potential. Independence is encouraged by respecting and valuing individual children's choices; the adults seek to ensure that all children have the opportunity to develop self-discipline and to initiate and extend their own learning. They are allowed to develop at their own rate in an environment based on their needs, which are identified by staff through careful observation and assessment. There are numerous opportunities throughout the nursery for children to experience and develop their own learning style.

Staff members discuss their philosophy and goals regularly and they work closely with children's families. They reflect on their own practice, including through the use of peer observations, which have recently become a fully embedded part of the setting's approach. Overall, this nursery has an atmosphere of being one large and loving family, where every adult knows every child and strives to help them develop into competent, confident, lifelong learners.

Learning and Development:

Each of the children's rooms has clearly defined areas of learning, including Montessori resource areas, role-play, quiet areas, creative and snack areas. The children have the freedom to choose and repeat activities in their own time and in their own way during the morning and afternoon work cycles. Group activities are also offered; in the pre-school room this is mainly during the transition time before lunch or tea. The children are accustomed to this rhythm and naturally come to the end of their own activities and join the group if they wish to do so. In the toddler and baby rooms, the group activities are set up at the start of the work cycles and children are invited to participate as and when they show an interest, giving a degree of flexibility in the daily routine to meet the needs of these age ranges.



All of the rooms open onto the outdoor area, which also has clearly defined areas of learning. Children enjoy free flow access outdoors during the work cycles. Specific members of staff support the children in this experience-rich outdoor environment, such as reading with them, offering counting and sorting activities, role-playing or enjoying the elements.

Using the meticulous observations gathered by all staff during the week, the individual needs of every child are taken into account at the extensive and detailed weekly planning meetings of each room's team. During these meetings each child's progress and next steps are reviewed and activities planned, and staff consider which other children may also enjoy and benefit from the same activity.

The nursery uses a secure, web-based recording and planning system, which has been fully implemented since the first visit. It is working with the system's provider to ensure that it is used very effectively, such as for the generation of reports, including two year old progress checks and transition reports, and for the chronological monitoring of activities and presentations. Staff members use this digital system to successfully link the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) aspects of learning and development to the Montessori curriculum in each child's records, and they report positively about its use in the setting.

Nurturing the development of each child is central to the setting's ethos and this is seen in the dedication of the staff as they understand and celebrate all aspects of a child's learning journey.

Prepared Environment: resources and materials

All members of staff acknowledge the importance of providing a carefully prepared environment and of their role within it. They ensure that all activities are accessible to the children and that the layout of the rooms encourages maximum freedom and independence. The rooms are organised so that children can self-select their choice of activity and, when they are able, can independently return it to the shelf once they have finished, so that another child may enjoy it.

The baby unit is specifically designed for very young children. The main room is divided into different zones. There is an area for non-mobile infants, with bean bag mats and plenty of toys to stimulate their senses. There is an area for the development of gross motor skills, including climbing and balancing and a partitioned area for messy play. The unit also has a milk kitchen, and changing and sleeping areas. Off the main room a door leads to a ramp, allowing access to the outside classroom. The babies have direct access to a paved area with sit-on trundle toys, a small wooden playhouse and equipment that can be constructed to make balancing paths. Through a latched gate they have access to the main outdoor classroom and have free choice to be in this area



with supervision.

The materials and activities on offer are of an excellent quality and range. Staff members regularly monitor the activities to ensure that they are meeting the needs of the children and make adjustments if necessary. For example, in the toddler room the staff had observed that the children had mastered a particular colour peg puzzle but were still gaining enjoyment and learning from the different colours. They exchanged the puzzle for a more complicated one, with more pieces and smaller pegs but including the same colours. In the baby room, staff regularly research ideas to extend the babies' learning, supplementing and extending the activities available to them.

The toddler and pre-school rooms have direct access to the outdoor classroom. This is resourced, staffed and planned with the same diligence as the main rooms. It is organised according to the Montessori curriculum and EYFS areas of learning. Observation sheets, the mission statement and classroom rules/routines are clearly displayed on the outside wall. The planning of outdoor activities is adapted to the interests of the children; for example the playhouse was a 'space station' during the second visit.

Following a recommendation from the first visit, the staff team has assessed the purpose and target audience of the indoor displays. Many of these displays have been removed, which makes the rooms feel much calmer whilst retaining a general buzz from the children's wonderfully industrious activity. The information on display at the second visit was predominantly at children's height and of relevance to them, such as photographs of their recent sports day, which they enjoyed looking at.

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

The high level of independence of all children in the nursery is commented on by parents. From the babies onwards, children who are able to find their peg for their coats, help themselves to breakfast, pour their drinks from small china jugs and wash up when they have finished. In the baby room, independence is assisted by having the child's photo on their drinks mug, snack pot and belongings tray, where they keep their personal items. In the toddler and pre-school rooms small posters with photos showing the sequence of activities for having breakfast, snack and lunch are displayed at child height for them to refer to. The routines are well embedded and children know when they need to ask an adult for assistance.

Throughout the work cycles, children independently choose their activities and where they wish to work. They have the freedom to repeat activities, which helps them consolidate their understanding and encourages their independent learning. They have the freedom to move from one area to another within their room and to the outside area, they understand the ground rules and respect this freedom of movement. Once



outside, children of all ages mix freely. Here, siblings seek each other out and play together.

During both re-accreditation visits, there were many examples of respect and offers of help from one child to another. On one occasion, a child was squeezing a lime. Another child was very interested in this activity and wanted to do it themselves. They asked, "May I watch you do that?" When the first child did not respond, being too engrossed in the activity, the second child sat opposite to observe the child squeezing the lime without disturbance, waiting patiently while the activity was repeated before being able to have a turn. Children also demonstrate respect for their environment: they sweep, mop up spills and tidy their work away before starting another activity. They are careful to change their shoes when they come in from the outside and quickly inform staff if the floor is wet and that the 'wet floor sign' needs to be put up.

Parents are actively encouraged to foster independence at home. Outside each main room in the nursery is a board to which parents can add details of experiences and successes from home so that these can be shared with the nursery. Parents comment on how genuinely interested staff are in what the children do and achieve at home. Regular communications, such as daily verbal feedback, written sheets and information booklets on various stages of development and behaviour, all help to ensure a consistent approach to independence and discipline at home and nursery.

Montessori practice: Classroom management

The planning system is extremely effective. Staff in each room (including the outdoor classroom) plan as a team on a certain day each week. This takes place during lunch times, and additional staff members are specifically employed to cover this time. Over the course of the week, the staff team gather observations and make notes of children's interests. These are collated by the room supervisor in preparation for the planning meeting. Target activities or experiences are planned for individual children to share with their key person. Staff members choose the activities for which they wish to take responsibility for preparing and write detailed lesson plans. Despite the amount of time and effort that is put into planning the weekly and daily experiences for the children, members of staff are flexible and confident to spontaneously follow the needs and interests of the children in their care. Rotas and areas of responsibility are also discussed during the planning meetings, so every member of staff feels they have a voice and their views are listened to.

All three rooms have a morning and afternoon work cycle of around three hours. Babies sleep and feed as and when they need to during this time. The toddlers also have a rest time after lunch for those that need it. Children joining for afternoon only sessions have as rich and varied experiences and learning opportunities as those attending for a morning session or all day. Tea is served at 16.00 for those who stay beyond this time.



There is a good mix of child-initiated and adult-led activities. Additional activities such as 'Zumba', yoga and music are offered during the day. These are often child-initiated and not delivered at set times each week.

The freedom of movement that the children enjoy, including to outdoors, means that room supervisors have to be vigilant as to the dynamics within their room, both in regard to staffing and numbers of children. In the baby room this is very effectively managed by the room supervisor and the lead practitioner; they present as an extremely dynamic duo and the rest of the team benefits from this cohesion. Since the first visit, supervisors in the toddler and pre-school room likewise have become more mindful of where the adults are in relation to the children. The recently established practice of peer on peer reviews has led to a more reflective ethos across the setting, which helps ensure that all the teams are working cohesively for the benefit of the children.

Montessori Practice: links with parents, including reports and records

Staff responsibilities and duties are clearly defined and easily understood by staff and parents. Every child has a key person who is responsible for their record-keeping. Each room's team works closely together, and each develops a very effective relationship with the families of the children in their care. Consequently, parents are happy to liaise with any member of the room's team to discuss their child's day.

Parents report that they are extremely happy with the communication they receive from the nursery. They feel it is a strong partnership and that they are very well supported in the upbringing and care of their children. One parent said she felt she was a much better mother because of the help, support and guidance she had received from the nursery staff. Another parent said he could enjoy his time with his children more as he knew better how to meet their needs because of what he had learnt from staff.

When a child first starts in the nursery, at the end of the first day, the parents are presented with an A4 page of photographs and comments about what their child has experienced that day. Parents also receive daily feedback regarding their child's wellbeing and care routines. They are encouraged to provide photographs of home life, siblings and relatives. In the baby room these are placed on the walls in poster form, for the children to look at. In the other two rooms they are made into books and placed in the reading corner. Children love to go and look at their book and share it with their friends.

Parents receive half-termly newsletters and communications are sent out regularly by email. Montessori information evenings and a parents evening held in the summer term further support collaboration between home and nursery, and a written report is prepared at the end of the child's time at the nursery in the form of a 'leaving letter' to share with their new school. Since the first re-accreditation visit the nursery's staff has



been fully trained in its use of the web-based recording system, and this system has been presented to the parents. Although it has only recently been introduced, early reports from parents about its value to them have been positive.

Staffing:

The nursery is jointly owned; one of the owners is based at the sister setting, the other owner is part of the Willow Park team which covers for staff during planning meetings.

The appointed manager works full-time and is Montessori qualified. Along with her administrative and management duties, she has daily contact with all the children.

One other staff member is Montessori qualified, and works in the pre-school room. The majority of the team have recognised childcare qualifications, including four with early years degrees. In-house Montessori training is offered to all staff. The whole team is encouraged to attend Montessori Schools Association regional training days. Continued professional development records highlight when staff are required to update and refresh their qualifications and training. They benefit from training offered by Suffolk County Council and the Early Years Partnership. The management team also undertakes regular training courses and cascades knowledge to the rest of the staff. This is evidenced in the staff meeting minutes. Whole setting staff meetings take place once each half term.

The smooth running of the nursery is enhanced by the effective staff rotas with, for example, part-time staff covering meal times and lunchtime. Each room has a supervisor, and lead practitioners in the Ladybirds and Owls rooms.

Presently, the management are trialling a new induction process. It was not possible to assess the effectiveness of this during the re-accreditation visits as staff turnover is very low, and the setting has not yet had a chance to complete the process with a new member of staff. The job descriptions are very clear and make reference to the Montessori ethos and practice.

Overall, the nursery has a highly committed and well-functioning, adaptable and mutually supportive staff team whose members know all the children by name and are happy to help and assist in any area of the nursery. They embrace their roles and responsibilities with enthusiasm and dedication; they obviously enjoy their work and this shines through in their care and regard for the children.

Name of Assessor: Denys Lyne

Date report submitted: First visit – 11.02.16
Second visit – 01.06.16