



# **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” (2008) and subsequent 2012 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.

### **The Colourwheel Montessori Nursery**

Denton Crescent, Black Notley, Essex CM77 8ZZ

Date of first accreditation visit: 17 September 2013

Date of second accreditation visit: 1 July 2014

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

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

The Colourwheel Montessori Nursery opened in 2000 and is registered as a limited company. It is situated in a spacious, converted hospital building in the rural village of Black Notley in Essex. It comprises a large room which is partitioned into two main work areas, one of which has direct access to the garden. This room is for children between about 2 years and 5 years. There is also a sensory room and a separate room for babies from 3 months to 2 years. At the front of the building there is a spacious reception area with toilet and changing facilities leading from it. A kitchen and small office are situated to the rear of the nursery. There is a staff room upstairs.

The nursery is surrounded by grounds which include a hard standing area at the front for parking and two spacious grassed areas to the side and rear of the building. The back garden is set up with practical life activities, a wooden stage area and tables used for planned activities. The side garden contains large climbing apparatus and several gross motor skill activities.

The Colourwheel Montessori Nursery offers a mixture of both full time and part time places for 51 weeks of the year. The nursery is open from 07.30 to 18.00 from Monday to Friday and there are 110 children registered at the nursery and 38 in attendance on the day of the visit. The nursery provides breakfast, lunch and tea; which are prepared



on the premises. Provision is made for children who require an afternoon sleep. The nursery currently supports children with special educational needs (SEN) and those for whom English is an additional language (EAL). French and music sessions are available to all children one afternoon each week.

The owner and her deputy make up the management team and are supported by fifteen staff members, many of whom work full time. A part time administrator and two part time cooks are also employed. Four staff members hold degree qualifications and three hold a Level 4 Montessori qualification, and most other staff are either working towards a Level 2 Montessori certificate, or hold appropriate early years qualifications.

## Summary

The Colourwheel Montessori Nursery is a warm and friendly setting where children from 3 months to 5 years of age are offered a good quality Montessori education. The nursery successfully implements Montessori principles through the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) under the strong and passionate guidance of the owner and manager. She and her team ensure a commitment to Montessori learning through consistent practice, good use of positive language and trusting children to work with activities, solve problems and choose who they would like to work with. This trust empowers the children to be confident and ensures they have the opportunity for a three hour work cycle each day. Since the first accreditation visit, the team has successfully introduced additional language and problem solving activities.

Learning is encouraged in this spacious nursery by providing good opportunities for freedom of movement both indoors and in the carefully arranged outdoor areas. Part of the nursery's future plans includes the further development of the outdoor area with an all-weather awning. The recommendation made during the first visit to encourage learning about the natural world inside the classroom has been delivered through the introduction of plants, flowers, appropriate wall displays and seed growing. This enhances the appearance of the nursery and encourages further exploration and discovery.

Staff ensure parents are aware of their child's progress through an online record-keeping system that can be accessed by staff and parents. This is used very effectively to record observations, photographs, and videos of children and enables staff to evaluate and track progress and to compile reports. These enable the child's keyworker and the manager to have daily communication with parents, post messages and record observations. Parents are able to post requests and comments.

The manager ensures that staff members are familiar with their roles and responsibilities and undertake appropriate training, supervisions and appraisals. The team has considered many strategies to encourage formal reflective practice since the previous accreditation visit. They undertake regular peer observations that,



when fully implemented, will continue to enhance Montessori practice and ultimately enrich children's learning.

The manager and her staff team form close and supportive relations with families and the wider community. The manager has a strong vision for the nursery and is receptive to change and open to ideas. Staff should take pride in their good knowledge and understanding of child development and good Montessori practice.

***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 consider strategies, such as peer observations, to ensure that effective practice is formally recorded and, when fully implemented, can be used to inform staff training and development.
- Continue to review and renew resources as required.

#### **Philosophy:**

The Colourwheel Montessori Nursery recognizes the importance of a safe and nurturing environment for children and provides good quality Montessori education where children are free to learn at their own pace. Adults sensitively support each child by providing a range of activities, trusting their choices and supporting learning very effectively. The well qualified staff demonstrate a good knowledge of Montessori practices and show a deep understanding of child development as they support children's social and emotional wellbeing, as well as providing many opportunities for self-initiated learning.

Children are able to move freely between the indoor and outdoor environments. They independently access shoes and coats as they move from one environment to another, resulting in a busy and purposeful atmosphere throughout the nursery.

The principles and aims of the nursery are discussed frequently by team members, and are clearly outlined in documentation for parents (produced following the first visit). This documentation describes the areas of a Montessori classroom, the basis of a three period lesson and how parents may support learning at home. The management team uses the online facility very effectively to inform parents of events and they are developing a website for prospective families and to share links to the wider Montessori community.



## **Learning and Development:**

The main classroom is organized into the different areas of learning. Children from about 2 years old to about 5 years are grouped together in this room and benefit from an uninterrupted morning work cycle of almost three hours. They have access to all areas and can freely select activities from open shelving both inside and outside. Planned craft activities are available outside, although children are free to work independently with other activities should they choose. Snack is freely available throughout the session in the practical life area of the room and children demonstrate good independent skills. Towards the end of the morning, there is an adult led 'coming together' session, either inside or outside. Children are free to join this very well led session, while others choose to set the tables for lunch.

In the baby room adults ensure babies have access to a range of developmentally appropriate, interesting and diverse activities. They support learning through closely observing the babies' interests and then planning accordingly. Physical and language development are effectively supported through assisting infants in the use of apparatus and by the adults' use of clear and calm descriptive language.

Throughout the nursery, all children have their needs met through the implementation of individual and flexible planning. Staff use an online recording system very effectively for individual observations, photographs, assessments and for identifying next steps in learning. This ensures observations of the children and samples of their work and Montessori activities are recorded chronologically, linked to the learning goals in the EYFS framework and available for parents to access at any time. Following monitoring by the manager, parents are able to securely access their child's folder online. Parents are able to respond, input their child's interests and progress at home and they speak highly of this system.

Adults work sympathetically with the children, using positive language and supporting them by introducing the range of activities and using appropriate strategies, such as open questioning and reflective listening. Brain gym techniques and strategies, such as spontaneous singing, are used very effectively to enhance a quiet and calm atmosphere. These increase children's understanding of respect, good manners and language development and generally give the nursery a happy feel.

Outside, staff actively encourage creativity and imagination through the skillful use of resources and the introduction of new and interesting equipment.

The nursery meets the requirements of children with additional needs very effectively by providing one to one support, by accessing specific resources and by ensuring close links with appropriate professionals in the wider community.



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

The outside areas are thoughtfully laid out to provide two contrasting environments for exploration. Part of the tarmac area is secure and carefully designed to offer good opportunities for children to extend learning through outdoor practical life activities and it is suitable for use throughout the year and in all weathers. The grassed areas provide a stimulating and varied environment with a very good range of climbing and gross motor skill activities, and a wooden covered ark 'classroom'.

The baby room is bright and airy with plenty of space for babies to move about, select activities from low shelving or to sit at tables to play. This room is well laid out with an appropriate range of interesting and inviting activities for babies that meet their developmental needs, including early practical life and sensorial materials.

In the main room activities are clearly grouped for different areas of learning and accessibility to activities and resources is good. There is a good selection of books and instruments and a well resourced art and craft area. Creative and imaginative play is encouraged through appropriate resources being available and the opportunity to participate in planned craft activities is evident. The nursery also provides a good range of indoor and outdoor practical life activities. These are made freely accessible and are well organized.

In the main room there is sufficient space available for children who want to work on the floor or at tables. Following recommendations in the initial visit, some new activities have been purchased and many have been made by staff. This is especially evident in the Montessori language and problem solving areas, where many staff who are training have created individual activities as part of their coursework. These increase the range of choices, reflect the present children's interests and supplement Montessori activities. It is recommended that staff continually review and renew activities as children's interest wanes or activities become tired.

Since the initial visit, the deputy manager has utilized a store cupboard and created a sensory room for the children. This is a delightful addition to the nursery encouraging language development, imagination and exploration. The nursery has also addressed the recommendation to enhance learning about the natural world by the introduction of plants, flower arranging and seed growing, and many appropriate wall displays at the children's height.

Adults in the nursery carefully prepare and maintain the indoor and outdoor environments to enable children to access them fully.

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

Independence is facilitated effectively throughout the nursery due to the attentive,



sensitive and caring nature of the adults. Staff ensure children make their own decisions and are confident in redirecting them to activities when they are ready. They allow them to become fully engaged in their activities without interruption. Staff offer children a good level of freedom of movement, freedom of choice and access to activities inside and outside the nursery. Children are supported in understanding the cycle of activity and are confident in selecting, completing and returning activities independently, and in joining group sessions should they choose.

The nursery provides adult-led, group or individual craft activities as an additional choice, and children are free to participate or not as they wish. Independence is fostered at snack and at lunch time, as children help set tables, serve themselves and clear up afterwards.

Access to the outdoors is freely available throughout the day. Children are encouraged to change in and out of their outdoor clothing independently and this approach extends to their having a choice of the activities that are available for the session. Both inside and outside, children have the opportunity to work individually, alongside or with others, or alternatively in teacher-led activities. This encourages the development of social skills, friendships and respect, and supports children as they learn to tolerate others and share resources.

The nursery works in close partnership with parents, providing information about Montessori areas of the classroom and opportunities for them to access and contribute to 'The Montessori Child' learning portfolios online. Regular informal updates allow parents to follow up projects at home and contribute by adding progress witnessed at home. More formal parents evenings are arranged regularly, with individual feedback on children's progress or information about Montessori practices. Parents comment on the open and friendly communication with all staff at the nursery.

Overall, staff adhere to the principle of independence and, given freedom of choice and freedom of movement, children are encouraged to develop self discipline and good social skills.

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

All children in the main classroom are free to move about, both inside and outside, selecting activities that take their interest for almost three hours in the morning session. There is the opportunity for children to rest or sleep after lunch should it be required.

In the afternoon, teacher-led activities are provided for older children and younger children are also encouraged to participate or watch if they wish. Babies are given plenty of opportunities to play outside alongside older age group children and all children are frequently taken on walks to the nearby countryside.

The baby room is organized and managed to meet their developmental needs by



providing access to heuristic play, a range of early practical life and sensorial activities. The provision of new activities in the main classroom since the initial visit has offered further opportunities for the older children to explore and learn, and has enhanced the overall look of their room.

Adults work well to oversee the preparation and maintenance of the rooms, ensuring that a favourable learning environment is created for all children. The management team ensures adults are aware of their roles and responsibilities through the careful deployment of staff to the different areas of learning. This works well as staff readily take turns in accepting responsibility for particular areas in the room, leading craft activities, supporting snack or working outside.

Following a recommendation from the first visit the management team have started to consider strategies to ensure that good practice is formally recorded and, when fully implemented, can be used to inform staff training and development.

Adults in the nursery know the children very well and interact well with them, supporting their independence and giving them time to choose activities and encouraging them to complete their cycle of activity. There is a successful key person system in place that delegates overall responsibility for record keeping for key children to particular staff and which gives children a sense of security. The manager takes responsibility for overseeing record keeping. Staff work closely with each other to ensure each child is appropriately guided across the areas of learning.

The management team has a clear staff induction and training process which results in calm and dedicated staff who know what is expected from them and they act as good role models. Children are aware of what is expected of them.

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

Staff have a good understanding of health and safety procedures and policies and daily checks exist to support this. During interviews parents commented on the effective key person system.

Key people carry out spontaneous observations throughout the day using iPads. They are responsible for entering observations onto the online 'The Montessori Child' recording system which links them to the learning goals within the EYFS. Photographs of children working and of samples of their work are uploaded and record achievements very effectively. The manager takes responsibility for overseeing records before they go live to parents. The system provides a daily and chronological record of each child's learning and development and can be viewed online by parents. The next steps in learning are generated by the system, and additional activities, group sessions and individual information can be inputted to the system so they can also be recorded. This ensures the system reflects the individual activities of the nursery.



Individual Learning Journals are generated by the online system and include additional photographs of children working and short written comments by staff. The statutory two year old checks are also carried out using the online system. Steps are taken to ensure data is effectively protected in that all staff and parents have passwords and sensitive information is stored securely. The records are readily available for parents and many contribute to these by adding their own observations and comments. This is a strength of the nursery and is highly regarded by staff and families.

Parents and the child's next school receive informative written reports when the child leaves the nursery. These provide a good summary and celebration of children's achievements in the Montessori areas of learning, and the additional section on social and emotional development enhances the range and quality of this information.

Daily communication with families and parents is very good and they are supported appropriately. The manager is available at any time to speak to parents and encourages strong links with the local community, such as by sharing resources with other early years practitioners and welcoming appropriate health professionals to advise on children's specific areas of development. Parents comment on the openness of staff and the ease with which they can discuss issues with them. Regular newsletters keep parents well informed about events in the nursery and opportunities to get together socially.

There are many opportunities for current parents to engage with staff informally and, following the initial visit, the nursery has created more formal ways to promote its commitment to Montessori practices. A recent parents evening with a talk by a Montessori professional and additional documentation about the different areas of a Montessori classroom and how parents can support children, demonstrated the nursery's commitment and reinforced parents' understanding of the Montessori approach. These opportunities all serve to highlight the quality of the provision at the nursery for current and prospective families.

### **Staffing:**

Staff at the nursery work as a close and committed team under the strong and passionate leadership of the manager. As a result, they are clear about their roles and responsibilities and show good knowledge and understanding of child development and Montessori philosophy. Teamwork is good, with all staff being aware of the need to support each other and to ensure that ratios and supervision are always appropriate. The team ensures the nursery is well organized, they are happy to maintain routines and place the child at the centre of their practice.

Staff and students are supported by appropriate documentation, frequent supervisions and annual appraisals. Following the initial visit, senior management have started to develop more formal methods of recording individual reflective practice and self-





evaluation. When fully implemented this will assist in the assessment and continued development of the learning provision and enhance staff's professional training.

The management team is supported by fifteen other staff members, some of whom work part time, and an administrator and two cooks. Three staff members hold Level 4 Montessori qualifications and four have degree qualifications. Five other staff members hold – or are working towards – Level 2 Montessori qualifications. The deputy has completed an Early Years Initial Teacher Training.

The nursery's strong commitment to Montessori training has a positive impact on both the quality of the provision and the confidence of staff. They are supported by specific in-service training, which ensures a consistency of practice across the team, and local authority and local Montessori training is available in response to the needs of individual staff and children.

The manager is committed to Montessori practices, open to change and has a strong vision for the future of the nursery. Informal plans include the current development of a new office and further enhancement of the outdoor area is planned for the future. The recommendation from the initial accreditation visit to provide additional Montessori activities ensures staff are effectively using their knowledge and understanding of Montessori practices. This, together with the full implementation of new peer observations, will enhance the excellent commitment to Montessori philosophy and the strong team work at The Colourwheel Montessori Nursery.

Name of Assessor: Carolyn O J McNeill

Date of Reports: First visit - 17/09/13

Second visit - 03/07/14