



# **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.

### **Rigg Farm Montessori Nursery**

Briscoe Ridge Lane, Beckwithshaw, Harrogate, North Yorkshire HG3 1QY

Date of previous MEAB accreditation: November 2011

Date of first re-accreditation visit: 10 May 2016

Date of second re-accreditation visit: 14 September 2016

**This accreditation is valid until 31 December 2021**

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

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

Rigg Farm Montessori is located on a small farm just outside Harrogate. It occupies part of the ground floor of the farmhouse and consists of an entrance lobby and cloakroom with child-sized toilets, and a large open-plan classroom which has a separate 'atelier' – a creative room. The classroom leads to an extensive outdoor area that covers three acres, although the area which is directly accessible to the children is fenced and includes grass, gravel and paved areas. As the children move freely from indoors to outside they are met by panoramic views of the Yorkshire countryside, with fields in which animals are kept, including chickens, pigs, sheep, a goat and other smaller animals such as guinea pigs. The children have a broad variety of activities in the



different areas outside, such as in the planting areas, on the outdoor classroom shelving, in the digging and water play areas and at a work bench which is equipped for outdoor creativity. There is also an enclosed pond, a fire pit and a storage shed. The nursery has sole use of its facilities during its opening hours.

All the children are in one vertically-aged group of 2½ to 5 year olds. Children can attend all day sessions from 09.15 to 16.00 or a mixture of mornings and afternoon sessions; the latter begin at 13.00. The nursery is open during state school term times, with the addition of a two week summer school. There are 52 children registered and 26 can attend at any one time. During the second visit 18 children attended for the morning and 18 in the afternoon, 11 of whom stayed all day. Each child brings in their own packed lunch and the children are offered nutritious snacks morning and afternoon. The nursery has a special educational needs and/or disabilities co-ordinator and provision is made for children with additional needs, including those for whom English is an additional language. The school was first registered in 1994 by the proprietor/manager, who is Montessori qualified and works full-time in the nursery. Six other teaching staff are employed, of whom four hold Montessori qualifications and one has an early years degree. Other than the proprietor and deputy, all staff work part-time; all were present for the day of the second visit. A secretary is also employed.

## Summary

Rigg Farm Montessori Nursery provides an exceptional Montessori learning environment. The setting demonstrates complete commitment to the Montessori philosophy, which radiates through every activity in which the children participate. The children show great respect for their peers, staff and for their environment, including through the daily care of the animals. The children have access to all the areas of learning both within the Montessori curriculum and in the Early Years Foundation Stage Framework (EYFS). The environments – both indoors and out – are carefully prepared by the dedicated staff team to offer a wide range of materials which are in excellent order and very appealing. The children show high levels of independence in everything they do during their nursery day and enjoy their freedom within the prepared environments. Throughout the day planned and spontaneous learning takes place, some adult-initiated, but mostly child-led. There are many opportunities for self-directed learning, a high proportion of these being outside.

The parents have an excellent rapport with the nursery and are delighted with the opportunities given to their children to learn in such a relaxed and nurturing natural environment. The staff work as an exceptional team, inspired by the very hard working and committed leader.

Since the previous MEAB accreditation the nursery has ensured that the length of the work cycle is maintained for all the children and has adopted a secure, web-based record-keeping system to cover all aspects of its planning, recording and assessment.



Following the first re-accreditation visit all the staff have worked together to produce a comprehensive set of language, literacy and mathematics materials to broaden and extend the children's experiences in these areas of the curriculum. They have also continued to implement peer observations and these are now used fully in the staff appraisal process and continuing professional development of the team.

***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 in order to ensure that high standards are maintained.

**Philosophy:**

This is a beautiful Montessori nursery in which the application of the Montessori philosophy and principles is evident in every activity that the children take part in. The highly stimulating learning environment offers the children excellent experiences and staff continually "follow the child". At one stage during the first re-accreditation visit all the children were working outdoors, some on their own, others with a friend, and there was a large group showing their creativity through interesting activities in the sand pit. There were examples of self-initiated learning, self-discipline when the children had to take turns to hold a guinea pig, and a real recognition of children's developmental needs with the range of activities on offer.

The adults did not interrupt the children in their play. They showed a high level of trust in the nature of the child and displayed a genuine understanding of Montessori principles, such as encouraging the children to be very independent, to explore and experiment. The philosophy is very clearly defined in the nursery's literature, in the welcome pack for new parents and on the website. It is reviewed regularly and staff are encouraged to reflect on Montessori

**Learning and Development:**

Rigg Farm Montessori Nursery offers the children an exceptionally wide range of activities that cover all the areas of learning of the Montessori curriculum and those of the EYFS. This broad range is available both indoors and in the outdoor learning environment which is used continually, even when the weather is inclement.

When the children arrive they are welcomed by the proprietor and join a short registration group during which any special news is shared. The children are pleased to see their teachers and friends and chat in a very relaxed manner. After this they



immediately start the work cycle and go to find their own activities. Both the morning and afternoon work cycles extend to almost three hours. The whole setting has a busy, purposeful hum and everyone understands the daily routines. Some staff members demonstrate new materials to children, whilst others move quietly amongst the children carrying out observations that they log on the web-based recording system using iPads.

This is a very child-centred nursery in which every child and their family receive outstanding support. There were excellent examples of the staff meeting the developmental needs of each child. During the second visit the children enjoyed harvesting vegetables that they had been growing. They planned their harvest vegetable stew and made bread to have with it. In small groups they worked with a teacher to weigh up ingredients, mix them and then knead the dough. They greatly enjoyed this task.

Long and medium term planning is carried out by the whole staff team, who then adjust the weekly and daily planning according to the observed needs of the children. Key persons oversee the observations, assessment and record-keeping for the individual child, for which they use a web-based system very effectively. This system links the EYFS areas with the Montessori curriculum automatically and staff members use it to track children's progress carefully, to identify their areas for development and also to reflect on the learning provision across the nursery. For children under 3 years who have not had the mandatory two year old progress check, staff generate this with the help of the parents using the digital system.

Staff meet for half an hour every morning to discuss the children's learning and development and plan any action that needs to be taken, they also meet at the end of the day and, due to the small size of the nursery and staff team, the children's learning and well-being is easily monitored and shared effectively, which ensures continuity of care despite most of the team working part-time hours. The adults make an impressive team and ensure that learning opportunities are used effectively.

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

The large room is organised into areas of the Montessori curriculum, each with a broad range of materials grouped on shelves around the walls. There is space for the children to work on the floor and sufficient child-sized tables and chairs for them to carry out their individual tasks. The room is light, airy and an inviting environment in which to work.

The 'atelier' supports creativity, with tables and hand-washing facilities. The children help themselves to clay to make models, they use the easels and an overhead projector, used to experiment with objects, shadow and light. The opportunities for free creativity are exceptional. On the floor is a large builders' tray with objects of interest from the environment. During the first re-accreditation visit there were two red tulips in a vase and, as the day advanced, the tulips opened up. One child was fascinated as the black



centres of the flowers became visible and was inspired to immediately sketch the tulip. This artwork was taken home and also shared with the child's family through the web-based records.

The outside environment has excellent facilities and resources, and offers exciting opportunities for all areas of learning and development. There is a mud kitchen in which the children 'cook' mud cakes and biscuits; an assortment of home-made musical instruments hangs on a fence, and open shelving containing Montessori resources.

The animals are a major feature, and the children collect the eggs daily, feed the hens and then count the eggs that they take into their 'little shop' so that the parents can purchase them, which encourages the children's early numeracy skills. Staff members invite the children to help them care for the plants and animals.

There is a very large sandpit where children can sit round the edge and play. A very popular activity is the large digging area where the children use child-sized spades. There is a large amount of play equipment that helps children develop their gross motor skills and refine their movement, including ride-on toys and a pirate ship, which was being painted by a group of children during the first visit. Raised beds and mini gardens planted in tractor tyres encourage the children's gardening skills. Great care is taken by all the staff to ensure the environment is kept clean, complete and inviting.

Following the first visit, all the staff have worked together to produce new materials for the language, literacy and mathematics areas, which will broaden and extend the knowledge of all the children, but particularly the older pupils. During the second visit children were observed using some of these new materials and they really enjoyed exploring them. These materials supplement the existing resources in this excellent Montessori prepared environment.

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

Independence is encouraged from the child's first day at Rigg Farm, and permeates the nursery's routines. When the children arrive they find their named peg, hang their coat and put their shoes or boots under their coats. They then enter the classroom and place their packed lunch container on the lunch trolley. Snack is prepared by the children and they are free to take their break when they wish. They wash and dry up their plates using a large bowl and draining rack on a trolley which is at their height; they do the same after lunch.

All the children enjoy their freedom to move around the setting, to select whatever materials they would like and enjoy the opportunities to work on their own, in pairs or in larger groups. Within the two daily work cycles they move from activity to activity and from indoors to outside seamlessly. There were very many examples of the children learning spontaneously, such as a pair of children comparing an atlas with the continent



globe and then comparing Europe to the larger continents, particularly Africa. Children show impressive levels of respect towards each other, such as when two children were by the guinea pig cage. They sat on the rim and started to stroke the guinea pig very gently, one of them showing the other how to hold and feed the animal. Both were thrilled and proud of their actions.

During the morning of the second visit the children discussed with the staff which vegetables they were going to harvest and then independently selected their tools, trugs and gardening gloves to gather beans, tomatoes, carrots, onions and potatoes. They proudly carried the ingredients for their stew. During the preparation there were excellent examples of sustained shared thinking and discussion about the germination and growing of the produce and about how to prepare it. Staff members pay particular attention to promoting children's self-awareness, confidence and self-discipline, and they are very adept at promoting positive behaviour. They interact with the parents frequently and online to encourage them to follow up on aspects of Montessori practice that they are encouraging at the nursery, such as nurturing children's independence.

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

The staff team at Rigg Farm Montessori manages the day with full regard for Montessori principles, offering an excellent mix of planned and spontaneous learning opportunities. The adults are very skilled Montessori practitioners: they remain inconspicuous and ensure that they place themselves where they are needed, in order to maintain staffing ratios indoors and out. They do not intervene when the children are deeply engrossed in activities but are always on hand to offer encouragement for the child to work out problems for themselves. Their presentations are excellent, as is their use of open-ended questions, which they use to extend the children's learning. All the harvest activities observed during the second re-accreditation visit were incorporated into the rhythm of the work cycle.

The vertical age grouping offers obvious advantages, as the older ones help the younger ones and the younger ones learn from their older peers. If any of the children need a sleep there are floor mats and rugs for them to rest on.

The procedures to support the smooth running of the setting are excellent. The team has rotas for the everyday duties in the nursery; these duties are very comprehensive. Staff members spend half a term being responsible for one area of the environment and then they move round. The nursery does not offer any additional activities as the children's day already has a full range of excellent opportunities.

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

Each child is assigned a key person, which strengthens links with families and which is much appreciated by the parents. Each key person is responsible for maintaining the



records and assessments for their group of children but all members of the staff team contribute observations of any child onto the web-based system. Observations are regularly shared with parents using this system, which also offers them home learning suggestions and the opportunity to add their own comments.

Daily liaison with parents takes place in both the morning and afternoon and the parents access all notices and regular informative newsletters through the web-based system. The parents have face-to-face consultations with staff in the autumn and spring terms and can request additional meetings to discuss any concerns. At the end of the school year comprehensive written reports are prepared, and when a child moves on to primary school the parents receive a detailed report which they can pass on to the new school. These reports are generated using the online system. The setting liaises with the next schools and staff from them are invited to visit the nursery. All the families are invited to an annual barbeque in the summer term. This event is very popular, with past pupils and their families attending. This is another indicator of the very strong links that this setting generates with its families. Parents are keen to express their satisfaction with the wonderful learning opportunities that the children are given at Rigg Farm.

### **Staffing:**

The proprietor heads up the staff team, supported by the full-time deputy. Five staff members, including the proprietor, have a Montessori qualification. In addition, the proprietor has a degree in Community Studies, another member of the team has an early years degree, and three have degrees in other subjects.

There is a development plan in place. This is reviewed and discussed with the whole staff team on an annual basis and is amended and augmented as and when necessary. Each new staff member has an induction pack and supervision, which includes an explanation of the Montessori approach used at the setting. There are comprehensive job descriptions and the proprietor carries out annual appraisals and regular supervision meetings. At the second re-accreditation visit staff members were very positive about the effective peer observation system which is now firmly embedded and see it as an aid to their self-reflective practice and development. Staff meetings take place daily, which are minuted and which all staff attend; longer monthly and termly meetings are also held. All the staff members benefit from regular continued professional development opportunities and have three staff development days per year.

The nursery benefits profoundly from the strong leadership of the dedicated and conscientious proprietor. She is supported by a staff team of very committed and caring teachers who all fully embrace the Montessori ethos and ensure that this is reflected in their daily practice.

Name of Assessor: Wendy E S Compson

Date report submitted: First visit – 11<sup>th</sup> May 2016

Second visit – 22<sup>nd</sup> September 2016