



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.

Wharfedale Montessori School

Strid Cottage, Bolton Abbey, Skipton, North Yorkshire BD23 6AN

Date of previous MEAB accreditation: November 2012

Date of first re-accreditation visit: 1 December 2015

Date of second re-accreditation visit: 25 April 2016

This accreditation report relates to the provision for children aged 6 months to 11 years.

Description of the school:

Wharfedale Montessori School is situated in a rural area of outstanding natural beauty and special scientific interest. It first registered with the Department of Education in 1990, offers care and education to children from 6 months to 11 years and draws pupils from a wide geographical area. The setting has three departments, all of which have sole use of their premises: the Wharfedale Babies, for children from 6 months to 3 years; the Children's House, for those aged 3 to 5 years, and the Primary School for those between 5 and 11 years.

The Children's House comprises two classrooms and a square central hallway. These rooms are linked to give the children free access across the ground floor of this property. These premises also have cloakroom and kitchen facilities. Outside, there are woodlands and grassed gardens, with a tarmac playground for the Primary School and a small and level sports field. The large tarmac driveway has a zebra crossing painted on it and provides space for ride-on toys. The Children's House also has a planting garden and a small enclosed tarmac area which is directly accessible from its building. The



Primary School is located fifty yards away from the Children's House in a purpose-built, recently constructed wooden cabin. It has a large lobby area, lavatory facilities and a light, spacious room with a kitchen area in one corner for staff and pupil use.

Wharfedale Babies is situated approximately one mile away in a small converted Victorian school. This has one large room with a modern, fully equipped kitchen gated off at one end of the room, a separate baby change/toilet area and staff cloakroom. There is also a store room/staff room. The building has been fully refurbished with the babies' requirements in mind and has under-floor heating. Outside, there is a large playground and a smaller grassed play area.

Wharfedale Babies is open from 07:30 to 18:30, Monday to Friday, 46 weeks of the year, and is registered for 16 children aged 6 months to 3 years. There are 17 children enrolled. On the day of the second re-accreditation visit there were two members of staff with the six children who attended in the morning and afternoon sessions, all of whom were under 2 years old. Wharfedale Children's House and Primary is open from 08:30 to 16:30, Monday to Friday, school term times, and is registered for 50 children, from 3 to 11 years. In the Primary department there are 15 children who attend full time; on the day of the second visit there were 14 children present for the whole day, with three members of staff in the morning and two in the afternoon. The 18 children enrolled at the Children's House attend a variety of sessions across the week; on the day of the second visit there were eight children present in the morning and nine in the afternoon, and on three days a week there are 17 children in attendance. Both sessions had three members of staff working in this part of the setting. There is provision for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities and for those with English as an additional language.

There are eight staff members in all, of whom four work full time. All staff in Wharfedale Babies work for four days a week. The establishment is organised and administered by the joint owners, one of whom is the Principal of the setting and the other the Head Teacher of the Primary school. Both the owners are Montessori trained; the Head Teacher has both early years' and primary Montessori qualifications and the Principal also has a City and Guilds adult education qualification and is a lead practitioner for the local authority. Two more of the team hold Montessori qualifications, with a further two undertaking Montessori training at present, and two have Qualified Teacher Status. A cook is also employed who is early years' qualified and works part-time in Wharfedale Babies.

Summary

Wharfedale Montessori School provides an excellent quality of Montessori practice. The staff team is a real strength of the setting; they nurture and guide the children and focus on supporting their emotional development and wellbeing. Very good use is made of the setting's location in an area of outstanding natural beauty as access to the outdoors is offered daily, in all weathers.



All three age ranges have inviting environments that are very well resourced, with many stored materials and activities that can be introduced and rotated across the year. The school provides a broad and rich curriculum that allows children to genuinely follow their own interests with the support of the attentive adults. A digital record-keeping system has been recently introduced and it already benefits the setting by enabling staff to observe and record children's progress efficiently, allowing them more time to spend observing and being with the children.

Adults' trust in the children is evident throughout the setting as the children are aware of the ground rules and are comfortable with the freedom they are given. This assists their growing independence right from the start in the babies' room. A clearly written transition policy has been introduced following the first re-accreditation visit; this helps staff support children and their families when they change rooms or join, or move on from, the school. Staff members clearly embrace the Montessori approach: they are provided with regular in-house workshops, peer guidance and external training to support their continued professional development. This investment in self-reflective practice has led to the creation of a team of enthusiastic and well-trained adults who support the children in a highly effective way.

Since the previous MEAB accreditation the school has developed an annual written report for parents that covers the Montessori areas of learning, with links to the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) outcomes for children in this age range. The provision outdoors has been developed to offer more opportunities for shared learning – for example in the Children's House large outdoor construction and Forest School activities encourage interaction.

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 point for further development:

- staff should evaluate the effectiveness of the learning environment using the recently introduced resource tracking system.

Philosophy:

The setting provides an excellent quality of Montessori provision across all its age groups. Wharfedale Babies offers a welcoming environment for infants, and has a gentle atmosphere created by the adults. Under their guidance the children can explore, enquire and develop in an emotionally secure setting.



The Children's House encourages exploration and independence within clear boundaries. The children are trusted to move freely between their three rooms, they select activities of their own choosing and work individually or in spontaneously formed groups. The provision of cleaning equipment allows them to care for their environment. The adults support the children both through their interactions with them and through offering them the space and time to work without interruption, which fully reflects Montessori principles.

In the Primary classroom the children are engaged and busy. The planning systems allow each child to select activities from current areas of learning, or to select any other activity of their choice after discussion with an adult. It is clear that the development of self-discipline is strengthened in this class through this management of learning. The trust built up in the Children's House is continued here and evident again between the staff and children. They are treated as unique individuals and the contributions from all children are valued.

In all areas of the setting the children are the leaders of their own learning, within the framework of the supportive environment provided throughout by the skillful adults. The adults treat the children with great respect; they encourage them to make decisions and support them in managing their own emotions. Activities assist this emotional development, including the opportunity to identify positive traits in one another, and to offer peers help and praise.

Staff members' understanding of Montessori principles is excellent throughout. The philosophy of the setting is explained in the prospectus, the parent handbook and also on the website. It is based on Montessori principles and is reviewed annually, with each staff member being able to offer input for this review during their own appraisals.

Learning and Development:

Each room is set up with clearly defined areas of learning. Children are able to freely access activities and have ample floor space and an appropriate number of tables to work on. In the babies' room there is one large, low table with non-tip chairs suitable for the infants.

Access to the outdoors is timetabled for all children, however in the Children's House and Primary the children can ask to go outside at any time and staff will facilitate this where possible. Due to the number of staff and the design of the building it is not possible for free-flow to take place continually in the Children's House. In the babies' room the children go outside during some morning sessions and every afternoon, and have appropriate clothing to protect them in all weathers.

The morning work cycle in the Children's House lasts for two and a half hours, and in the Primary it lasts for three hours. During this time the majority of learning taking place is spontaneous. Children are invited to work with adults but are free to choose not to if



they wish. Small group activities occur spontaneously, with children free to join and leave. In the afternoon there are additional activities on offer across the week, including 'Woodland Explorer' sessions in the nearby woodlands, cooking, music, dance, French, nature walks, and swimming for the primary aged children.

Planning for all the children is based on their current interests and needs, and this builds upon previous learning. For the infants this is based upon observations of their needs coupled with information from home. In the Children's House staff use their knowledge of children's progress and current observations to plan each week for individuals. In the Primary class the children and teachers work towards planning collaboratively; the children progress through the Montessori curriculum and have a weekly plan that includes activities to be done that week alongside activities that they can choose when to do.

Staff are able to make clear assessments using the web-based system and record them on this digital system using iPads unobtrusively in the classrooms. The records are of a high standard. Appropriate safeguards are in place to keep this digital information secure.

The Montessori curriculum followed in the Children's House is mapped to the EYFS Framework on paper and all staff members are familiar with this document. In the Primary, reference is also made to the National Curriculum and, although the school is not obliged to follow this curriculum, the staff team is fully familiar with its requirements. The setting is currently introducing a system which maps the National Curriculum to the Montessori curriculum.

Adults work together effectively to enable the children to operate independently within their learning environment. This ensures that the learning and development are of a very high standard.

Prepared Environment: resources and materials

The environment is organised in a clear and consistent fashion, with resources grouped by areas of learning. Low open shelving is in place in all classrooms, allowing easy access to the materials and activities on them. In all the rooms there is a wide range of developmentally appropriate Montessori materials which are well supplemented by those that are made by staff or bought. In the babies' room there is a wide range of sensory exploration activities, board and paperback books, gross motor development equipment, including steps and a slide set, early sensorial materials and two low and accessible sinks. Outside, their large tarmac area and grassed space has a play-house, gardening planters, water and sand play and ride-on toys. The Children's House's outdoor resources include bikes and trikes which are used on the tarmac, a planting garden, climbing equipment and a large construction area. The Primary children make good use of their own sports field and tarmac playground. Both these sections of the setting also have access to a woodland area that is used for Forest School and woodland exploration



sessions.

The resources are kept complete and clean in all areas. The adults in each room have specific roles to ensure the environment and materials are kept in good condition, and during the day they monitor the environment to check that the materials are ready for use. The recently introduced system for staff to track the children's use of the learning materials will enable them to evaluate when materials need to be rotated or new activities introduced, although this is not yet in place.

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

Independence is fostered from Wharfedale Babies right through to the Primary. Children are trusted to make their own choices and, with support, they do this well. Snack is made available so that they can freely choose, help prepare and eat it when they are hungry. The respect shown to the youngest children in allowing them to feed themselves when they are able to do so (and take as long as they need) is excellent. During the work cycle in the Children's House and Primary the children are free to manage themselves, with observant staff members trusting them to do so. Repetition of activities is frequent and a normal part of the child's day. Children from the Children's House and Primary classroom are able to spend time together outside during some afternoon sessions although this is not a timetabled event.

The adults demonstrate caring and considerate communication and interaction towards the children and this is reflected in how the children relate to each other. For example, in the Children's House during the first re-accreditation visit, one child supported another who was struggling to build a house for a dinosaur using wooden blocks in an empathetic and considerate way, taking into account the other child's skills.

Parents are introduced to the value of independence initially through the parent handbook and school prospectus. Daily verbal feedback between parents and key persons reinforces what can be done at home to support the child and keeps the parents up to date with the learning and development that is taking place at the setting.

Montessori practice: Classroom management

In the Wharfedale Babies and the Children's House rooms the children have activities that the adults would like to present or carry out with the child, or observe the child doing themselves; however, the majority of their work is spontaneously chosen. In the Primary class the planning is set out by the adult for the younger children (aged 6 to 9 years) and in conjunction with the child if they are older (aged 9 to 11 years).

Children in the babies' room who need to sleep have access to low beds. Usually the children sleep after lunch; however, there are no set times and when they are awake they play in a separate area. Sleep times are discussed with parents to ensure



consistency of daily routines for each child. In this room the lunch is cooked in the kitchen area and all children eat together at the low table, supervised and supported by the adults. In the Children's House and Primary the children bring packed lunches from home. These children set the tables and the adults in the Primary play a minimal role in this lunch preparation, just supporting this process if required. Breakfast is taken by those children who arrive before 09.00 in their rooms. A cooked tea is prepared for those who are attending the afternoon sessions in Wharfedale Babies.

A key person policy is in place in all rooms to facilitate liaison with parents, and each room's leader keeps an overview of the environment and staffing within. Each room has a comprehensive list of checks that need to be carried out daily, with allocated adults for each task. The room leader has overall responsibility for these. If a key person is absent then the other staff members in the room cover this person's roles to ensure continuity of care for the children. In the babies' room staff members ensure that they all spend time with each child to build early relationships, and the four day week staff schedule is arranged to ensure continuity of their care.

Classrooms are very well managed, as indicated by the calm and purposeful atmosphere throughout. The gradual increase in a children's self-management as they progress through the school is impressive, culminating when the oldest children in the Primary classroom have significant control over the direction of their learning.

Montessori Practice: links with parents, including reports and records

The setting's key person policy works very well in all the rooms; although observations of children can come from any adult, the daily feedback to parents is generally offered by their child's key person. The recently introduced digital record-keeping system is used to share records of observations, photos and assessments with parents online, including the two year old progress check. Parents also use this system to exchange messages with the setting, including with their child's key person.

The links with parents are strong. Besides the daily verbal feedback, the parents receive an annual written report and are able to complete a satisfaction survey on a yearly basis. Parents' evenings are held termly and up to date information is sent out via fortnightly newsletters by email, or as paper copies. A 'Friends' group has been set up by parents to offer another route for them to make enquiries or suggestions to the school, as well as for social and fund-raising activities.

On Wednesday mornings parents have the opportunity to stay in the setting and observe or work and play with their child. In the babies' room there are 'stay and play' outdoor messy sessions held twice a month, which families can join.

Following the first re-accreditation visit the setting has produced a clear transition policy that is used to help ensure that a transparent and consistent approach is taken during children's transitions between the three departments, and for children entering from, or



leaving to, other settings. All policies are shared with parents and are easily available for them to view. All records for a child are passed on at the point of transition.

Staffing:

Wharfedale Montessori is well managed and the level of staff qualifications across the setting is very good. Several new members of staff joined the school shortly before the first re-accreditation visit and it was evident at the second visit that they had quickly settled in, sharing the principled approach that is in place right across the setting.

The deployment of staff has been arranged in such a way as to ensure that each room has adults who are experienced in Montessori practice. The room leader in the Children's House has a teaching degree, is completing her Early Years Educator Montessori Diploma and has a Forest School Leader Level 3 qualification. The Head of the Primary has both the International Montessori Diploma and the Montessori Primary qualification. In total, three adults are qualified to degree standard, four hold Montessori diplomas, two are completing Montessori diploma qualifications and the others are all qualified to CACHE Level 3.

There is a plan in place which ensures that new members of staff receive training in the Montessori approach in addition to their standard induction. The induction process is thorough and includes observation visits, an induction handbook and peer support. Staff members have an annual appraisal that is backed up by more frequent peer observations. Regular staff meetings are held and minutes taken. Workshops are offered on a regular basis covering Montessori practice and philosophy alongside other topics. The setting has a comprehensive three-year development plan.

Staff members wholly embrace the ethos and principles of the Montessori approach and work together in a mutually supportive fashion to ensure the outcomes for the children are maximized in a careful and nurturing way.

Name of Assessor: Jeremy Clarke

Date report submitted: First visit – 05/12/15

Second visit – 27/04/16