



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.

Flying Start Montessori Pre-school

Sawbridgeworth Cricket Pavilion, Town Fields, Sawbridgeworth, Herts CM21 9AN

Date of previous MEAB accreditation: December 2012

Date of first re-accreditation visit: 16 June 2015

Date of second re-accreditation visit: 16 November 2015

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

Description of the school

Flying Start Montessori Pre-school was originally registered in 2009; it re-registered in March 2015 and became one of a group of five Montessori early years settings. It operates from Sawbridgeworth cricket pavilion in the village of Sawbridgeworth. The nursery has sole use of the building during the week. The pavilion consists of a large room with a kitchen attached, and there are double doors leading from the main room to the outside, which allow the children access to a patio and the cricket grounds.

The pre-school is open in term time only. Its morning sessions run from 09.00 to 13.00 on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday, and 08.30 to 11.30 on Thursday and Friday. On Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday it is open for a full day until 15.30.

There are currently 43 children aged between 2 and 5 years on roll. Thirteen of these are under 2½ years. On the day of the second re-accreditation visit 17 attended in the morning and stayed for lunch, three stayed on for the afternoon session, with one additional child joining just for the afternoon.



The principal of the nursery group runs Flying Start Montessori Pre-school in conjunction with a board of trustees. She is in regular attendance (but is not included on the staff rota). The appointed manager is responsible for the day to day running of the setting and works full time. Two other members of staff are full time and three work part time. The principal holds a full Montessori diploma together with a degree in Childhood and Youth Studies and Early Years Professional Status (EYPS). The manager holds a full Montessori diploma, and has a BA Hons degree. One other member of staff has a Montessori diploma and one has started training for this qualification. The other members of the team have suitable early years qualifications, with one holding a level 2 Montessori certificate. The pre-school supports student teachers during their teaching practice.

The children that stay all day bring their own lunch from home. The pre-school makes provision for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities, as well as for children with English as an additional language, and it liaises with external agencies such as the local authority and private therapists.

Summary

The staff at Flying Start Montessori Pre-school provide a calm and supportive early learning setting. The manager and her team create an environment where children truly flourish in their learning and development. Staff have high standards and high expectations of themselves and of the children, for whom they set challenging and realistic goals. The staff have excellent knowledge of children's individual needs and how they learn. Wonderful experiences are planned which stem from children's interests, and which provide them with excellent skills for the future. The staff team are extremely dedicated, enthusiastic and committed towards driving improvement in their practice to promote the children's learning.

The Montessori prepared environment, both inside and out, is conducive to learning. The low level shelving and the use of stimulating Montessori and other resources, which are suitable for the children's ages and stages of learning, foster independence and meet the needs of the children attending. The school has met the recommendations made at the previous MEAB accreditation and, as they have changed their record keeping system to a digital, web-based method, they can have even more regular written contact with the parents to augment the effective verbal and written communication that is already in place.

The staff are highly committed to working in partnership with others to continue to promote their already excellent practice. The pre-school has enthusiastically met the recommendations from the first re-accreditation visit by implementing an uninterrupted work cycle and improving the lunch routine, which now more ably promotes the Montessori principles of 'grace and courtesy' and independence. Photographs of the staff are also now on display, making it easier for the parents and carers to identify the adults they need to talk to. Comprehensive self-evaluation



is embedded in practice, improvements are regularly made and the pre-school's decision to apply for MEAB re-accreditation is evidence of this commitment.

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:

Adherence to the Montessori philosophy is the foundation of the children's learning at Flying Start Pre-school. Staff members aim to give each child a firm base in education and to support them in meeting their full potential. They have high standards and expectations of themselves and of the children, setting realistic goals, being sensitive to the children's needs and encouraging independence. The calm atmosphere, industrious children and respect for the environment and each other ensure that the children have a positive first experience of school.

The pre-school operates an open door policy to promote partnership with parents; their presence in the setting is part of everyday life. The manager and her team recognize that the parents and carers are the children's primary educators and they are aware of the fundamental role they play in the children's lives. Information about the Montessori philosophy is available to the parents and they are kept up to date with their children's progress through sharing of records, regular emails and meetings. At the beginning of this academic year the staff very successfully introduced a secure, web-based, digital record keeping system, which the other settings in the group also use.

The goals of Flying Start are set out in the information the parents receive when their child is enrolled, on the website (which has recently been updated), and in the staff handbook. The comprehensive policies are also available to parents and are reviewed annually after having been sent to the parents for their comments.

The adults work extremely well as a team and the regular staff meetings that take place ensure that all the staff are fully informed of any changes and provide an opportunity to share good practice.

Learning and Development:

Flying Start Montessori Pre-school provides an excellent range of child-focused materials and activities in the classroom and outside, which closely reflect the needs of the children attending. The activities are changed as the need arises and to correspond with



the topic work for the week.

As the children are based in one room the staff plan together, ensuring that all the adults have an opportunity to contribute; each member of staff is allocated a week to plan for. Long term planning is comprehensive. Medium term planning is also done collectively, incorporating the plans of each member of staff. This setting currently plans independently from the others in the group, but the manager does meet up with the leaders of the other settings. One of the strengths of this school is the way they share the responsibility for planning and record keeping. Short term planning is based on the needs of the individual child and is drawn from the children's records and the observations made of them. This planning is the responsibility of the child's key person but is shared with all the staff by using a target/progress sheet displayed on the wall for all the adults to refer to in their work with the children.

The staff use the comprehensive web-based system for recording and assessing the children's progress, which links the Montessori and Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) areas of learning and development well. Recently introduced, this has been warmly received by both staff and parents. The parents very much appreciate the information it provides.

Most of the learning that takes place is child-initiated; by providing a varied range of activities and using the outside area effectively (whatever the weather) adults enable the children to become keen, self-confident learners. The classroom is large and accommodates the mixed age range effectively. This room is divided into Montessori curriculum areas as well as having a role play area, construction area, snack table and an art area. Water and sand play is also offered. The staff are allocated roles and an area of the indoors or outside on a daily basis and their responsibilities are recorded on a list displayed in the kitchen. All the staff therefore know what they should be doing without having to be told. This ensures that each day can run very smoothly.

Parents are involved with planning activities for their children and monitoring their progress as they have an opportunity to contribute regularly to their records, and the open door policy ensures that they can see what their children are doing on a regular basis and can comment on their progress. Children with additional needs are very well supported by the staff, who work closely with their families and outside agencies as necessary.

Prepared Environment: resources and materials

The large room is set up every week as the premises are shared with the cricket club. The internal environment is very well prepared, light and airy, with large windows overlooking the cricket pitch. Resources are organized into Montessori curriculum areas of learning, and a varied range of good quality and relevant Montessori and other materials are displayed on the child-level shelving. The shelves are very well laid out and the materials are displayed so that they are accessible to all the children. There is a



well-stocked art station and large construction area and the staff and children also use the large kitchen area as a quiet place to work in small adult-led groups during the morning and afternoon sessions.

As a high proportion of the children currently attending are under 3 years old, the staff have created an enticing area especially to cater for their needs, which has proved popular with all the children. Two treasure baskets have been created for the younger children as well as an exercise to filter muddy water. The imaginative exercises created for the activities of everyday living shelf are outstanding, such as string being used to represent worms to feed toy birds.

The management team have replaced some of the main resources since the first re-accreditation visit, including some of the tables, which has improved the aesthetics of the room. The range of natural resources in the classroom has also been increased. Spiders, centipedes, beetles and wood lice in a tank are a wonderful addition indoors and plants have been added for the children to observe and touch, water and care for. Logs and leaf collections have also been introduced.

The outside space is prepared each day and excellent use is made of their restricted facilities. The terrace area is set up as an outside classroom with resources that cover all areas of learning. Bikes and trikes are available for the children to use in a separate space. The grassed area is used for various activities including a 'habitat for dinosaurs'. On the day of the first re-accreditation visit a little boy was enjoying pretending to be a dinosaur and was showing the other children how dinosaurs behaved. They were all enthralled. A rope is used to define the space available to them and the children know not to cross over it and will even correct staff if they venture across. The resources for the topic area are available both inside and outdoors. On the day of the first visit a large vat of water with tea bags, a teapot and cups were available as their topic that week was 'The Tiger Who Came to Tea.' A picnic area had been created outside and the role play activity area inside was also set up as a tea party. Dinosaurs were a feature indoors on the second visit: the staff had created a natural environment with leaves and a real, small tree to represent the Mesozoic era.

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

There are many opportunities for children's independence to be fostered at Flying Start Pre-school. Information about the importance of independent learning is given to the parents when they first visit the school. When the children arrive in the classroom they are able to self-register by finding their names, and they then use their photograph to register for snack. This way the staff have a good understanding of who has visited the snack table. They self-select what they want to eat and when to have it and are also given the opportunity to wash up after, which improves their level of skill. The adults only support the children if they require help.



From the time that they arrive at the nursery the children are free to move around the classroom and can choose to work both inside and out during both the morning and afternoon sessions. They can work as part of a small group, in pairs or on their own. The low level shelving allows the children to be independent by selecting their own activity, choosing what they do and where they want to work. Each child is learning to do things for themselves so that they are able to be self-sufficient and independent in the classroom, while being supported with sensitivity by the adults. The children are considerate and co-operative and share resources very well. They develop excellent social skills and form good friendships, as they can freely choose how they want to work – alone or with others.

The parents feel very well informed and are very impressed by the level of independence achieved by their children, which they are able to see for themselves because of the effective open door policy. They have the opportunity to talk to staff at the beginning and end of each session. The staff write a section in their newsletter on Montessori activities and how to promote the Montessori philosophy and independence at home, with tips and information on the EYFS.

Group work generally is voluntary, with the children being given the opportunity to decline to join in if they choose not to or are working on another activity that interests them more. The nature walks, which are now less regular, take place at the end of the morning and are also voluntary, which is in keeping with the general promotion of freedom of choice at Flying Start Montessori.

Montessori practice: Classroom management

The work cycle in the morning is three hours long. The children are brought into the room in the morning and collected from the classroom at the end of the session by their parents or carers and only get their coats and bag after these adults have arrived. This helps ensure that transition to and from home is very smooth.

Half of the children stayed for lunch on the first visit and all of them on the second, and some stayed all day. The outside area is opened after all the parents have left, and the snack table is also prepared then. Following the recommendation from the first re-accreditation visit, lunch is now calmer and the children help lay out the lunch boxes, plates and cups. Empty lunch boxes are now left under the chairs. The children all start eating at the same time and they wash up their own plates and clean up after they have finished. This routine promotes a greater level of respect for each other and supports independence.

Also following the first visit, exposure to another language is offered in a way that ensures continuity of the work cycle, rather than interrupting it. A member of staff who speaks Tagalog uses this language with the children whilst working with them on relevant activities so that they are immersed in an additional language.



Daily checks by the staff are part of the routine of the school and all areas, including the classroom, are checked before being opened to the children. A 'traffic light' system is in use, which the children understand: if the sign is red the children know not to enter an area.

The afternoon work cycle begins as soon as the children finish eating and runs similarly to the morning session. A few children arrive just for the afternoon and they are seamlessly integrated into the group. If the children need to sleep they can go to the book corner, but the children who stay for the afternoon session tend not to have to sleep after lunch.

Montessori Practice: links with parents, including reports and records

When children start at the pre-school their parents fill in a 'getting to know you' form and staff complete the mandatory two year old progress check with the parents' contributions. Each child has an individual plan based on observations that staff have made and information received from the parents, either written or verbal. This plan is accessible in the classroom so that the adults delegated to present activities to the children on that day have a clear understanding of each child's requirements; this ensures that opportunities to follow the needs of the children and to plot their progress are maximized. As well as daily contact, one to one meetings with parents are organized on a regular basis. The staff are fully aware that parents are a child's prime educators.

The record-keeping system has been recently changed, with the introduction of the web-based system. Currently, the parents of the children who have been in the school a year also still have access to their children's Learning Journals, which they are able to contribute to and take home during the holidays. It is intended that all the children will soon have a 'My Montessori book' which will include their own work as well as observations from home; these will be paper records that will complement those held digitally. The parents reported that they are very happy with this arrangement and feel very involved in their children's progress. The local authority have provided the pre-school with a new transition document to be used when the children move on; this offers a more comprehensive format than the last one.

The child's key person is responsible for checking that observations are carried out and for compiling the comprehensive records. However, all staff members contribute to this process. When the key person has updated the children's records they are discussed with the whole team to ensure consistency and to share their experience and knowledge, which works very well. The open door policy enables parents to pass on their views and comments at any time for consideration. They feel very well supported. Parents and family members are welcome to share their skills and knowledge with the children. Recently a father has come into the pre-school with his guitar and another brought in tadpoles in the spring. The regular flow of relevant information between the staff and the parents helps ensure that the care provided is appropriate and consistent.

