



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) and subsequent 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.

Grantham Farm Montessori School

Grantham Farm, Baughurst, Tadley, Hampshire RG26 5JS

Date of the first re-accreditation visit: 19 May 2014

Date of the second re-accreditation visit: 29 September 2014

Date of previous MEAB accreditation: September 2008

This accreditation report relates to the provision for children aged 2½ to 7 years.

Description of the school

Grantham Farm Montessori School is in a converted barn, comprising a large, open plan classroom and an upstairs room with gallery for the 2½ to 5 years olds (the Children's House), and two smaller classrooms for the 5 to 7 year olds (Grantham Farm). The building has toilet, cloakroom and kitchen facilities along with access to two paved outside areas, which are both reached through large double doors that lead off the open plan classroom. Children in the 5 to 7 classroom also have doors leading to one of these outside spaces. Both outside areas also offer access to a lawn area and garden, together with a natural playground providing activities for climbing and balancing. A further 20 acres of fields and woodland add to this outside space and include a swimming pool and large pond.

Whilst the school accepts children aged 2½ to 11 years, this accreditation report relates to the 2½ to 7 year age range. The school is open five days a week during term time, from 08.30 to 15.00 daily. For the younger children a variety of sessions are available that offer a choice of three drop-off times and three pick-up times; alternatively these children can stay all day, as those of school age do. There are currently 24 children on roll. On the day of the second re-accreditation visit 14 children aged 2½ to 7 years attended the morning session and 8 children stayed all day. All children who stay for lunch bring a packed lunch. After lunch the children who stay all day enjoy time in the garden. The school makes provision for children with individual needs and English as an additional language (EAL).



The school opened in 1985 and is privately owned. The owner is the school principal who holds a Montessori diploma. She is supported by seven members of staff all of whom hold appropriate childcare or teaching qualifications. On the day of the second visit the team was made up of three full-time members and one part-time member of staff.

Summary

Set within the grounds of Grantham Farm, the school offers a beautiful location and access to surrounding farmland for the children who attend. Complementing this outside space, the classrooms are prepared with careful attention to detail, which ensures that the school provides a learning environment for all children to develop an enthusiasm to explore, discover, ask questions and make decisions. All children are confident, motivated and eager to learn. This is seen in the way they are busy, engaged and keen to challenge themselves to try something new. The structure of the day enables younger children to have opportunities to integrate with the older ones, whose empathy and respect are shown in the way they support and help them.

The consistency and commitment of the team in working together to find ways to share and assess their practice reflects the strength of the leadership and team in providing an environment that gives the children many possibilities to make progress.

Since its first MEAB accreditation the school has ensured that all team members regularly engage in the opportunity to revisit the Montessori philosophy and make connections with it across the Early Years Foundation Stage framework (EYFS) and the National Curriculum. The staff appraisal system has begun to include a selection of strategies for peer observations and this, together with the recent introduction of a web-based assessment system, shows the school's commitment to reflective practice, to communication and to working as a team.

Following the first re-accreditation visit the team have worked to ensure that their review, self-evaluation and reflective processes provide evidence for practice which shows how the school provides opportunities for learning. Changes made to the environment now provide children with a greater choice of space as to where to play and work and promote a more spacious and open environment, enabling children to view clearly the activities on offer.

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:

- Review and evaluate the effectiveness of observations prepared for the web-based assessment tool 'My Montessori Child';
- Continue to develop peer observation, both as a team and individually,

Philosophy:

Grantham Farm Montessori School provides a stimulating environment for the children who attend and enables them to engage, learn and make progress.



The school aims to meet individual needs by promoting the child's love of learning and supporting them to reach their full potential. This is achieved across both age groups through providing an environment that promotes free choice of learning, working and playing individually, in pairs and in small groups. The incorporation of the Eco School ethos alongside the Montessori pedagogy complements and enhances the children's knowledge and understanding of the world around them. Since the first re-accreditation visit the team have reflected and, using aspects of Montessori's theory, they have reviewed their classroom organisation. Simple changes to the layout of the environment have enabled a greater understanding of the Montessori principles when preparing the environment for the children who attend.

The staff work well as a team; they are aware of their roles and communicate effectively with each other.

The school's website clearly documents the school's aims for the children. These are reviewed annually by the team and parents have introductory talks on Montessori philosophy when their children join Grantham Farm.

Learning and Development:

At Grantham Farm Montessori School children across all the age groups have opportunities to play and learn inside or outside. Access to one part of the outside area, which provides opportunities for bike play, is available for the children of the Children's House from the time they arrive at school. Once all the children have arrived and settled, the other part of the outside area is also opened. Children self register inside and out and are aware that a maximum number of children are allowed outside at any one time.

The morning work cycle for all the children is over three hours. During this time children have the opportunity to freely and independently choose where they would like play and work. At the first re-accreditation visit those in the Children's House were engaged with a variety of individual activities including working with numbers matching the numerals to quantity, reading books and joining small, adult-led groups that emerged spontaneously and which introduced new concepts. For example, on the morning of the visit one lesson was observed where the children were seen to be telling the story of the life cycle of a butterfly with a book and objects. The teacher provided the children with specific nomenclature, answered questions and encouraged the children to recall what they knew.

During the first visit a planned small group lesson for the Grantham Farm (5 to 7 year olds) children took place outside. Children were introduced to a small selection of tone bars and the concept of the pentatonic scale. Once presented, the children were left to explore the sounds and tones and discuss them together. Occasionally the teacher facilitated by offering the children new words and concepts to match their discoveries. Later on the children were heard playing 'Twinkle Twinkle Little Star'. Several of the older children chose to work outside for the rest of the morning. During the second visit this group were individually engaged in their own research projects, which for one child included learning about the giraffe, its family and environment. Children were motivated to discover aspects of the topics they had chosen and later on were eager to share their new-found knowledge with others.

After lunch much of the learning takes place through planned group lessons. During the first



visit the Children's House engaged in a garden activity: they looked at how plants grow and weeded the flower beds. The Grantham Farm children embarked on a new, self-chosen geography project and looked at South Africa. This activity provided a balance of teacher- and child-led learning and started with a discussion as to how the children would like the project to evolve and what they would like to learn. Later, in self-chosen pairs or small groups, the children started to work on compiling their research.

Children are learning at their own pace and through their own developing ability to make choices from the environment that has been prepared for them. The majority of learning in the Children's House is through 'hands on' exploration and discovery. Whilst the Grantham Farm children still have choices in their learning programme, it is more structured and planned by the adult. Following the first visit the team made some subtle changes to the environment in order to highlight the range of resources linked to the curriculum that is on offer. This has included giving more choice about where to work, on tables, on the floor and in what area.

The school provides individualized help for children with additional needs. Various strategies including timelines, picture cards and Makaton are used to support the children with their communication and the setting works with parents and with outside agencies as necessary.

The team is able to ensure that individual needs are met through the use of a variety of planning strategies that focus initially on the individual child and then look at ways of incorporating learning needs into the provision for the whole class. The older children work with their own daily planners, which ensure that handwriting, comprehension and mathematics activities take place every day.

The school uses a selection of formative assessment strategies to ensure that staff are able to make informed, regular assessments of each child's learning. Learning Journals link the Montessori curriculum to both the EYFS and the National Curriculum and highlight progress. Observations are recorded using the web-based recording system 'My Montessori Child'. This system automatically indicates suggestions for individual planning for each child based on the information previously entered. It links both the EYFS and the Montessori curriculum and thereby provides clear statements and connections between both. Through the use of a variety of summative assessments and charts, including the mandatory two year old assessment, the team is able to show where the children are in their learning and what their next steps might be. Following the first visit the staff members are far more confident with the new observation, assessment and planning process using 'My Montessori Child'; however, opportunities to see the child's overall development could be missed when summarizing a child's learning journey, through the choice of focus and familiarity of learning chosen by the adult.

Prepared Environment: resources and materials

All the classrooms at Grantham Farm Montessori School provide opportunities for independence, exploration, discovery and spontaneous learning. The materials provided are clean, well cared for, complete, appealing, well displayed and appropriate for developmental needs.

Each room has clearly defined curriculum areas that relate to the learning and development needs of its children. Spontaneous learning for the Children's House happens naturally and easily because the activities are displayed on shelves at the child's level, they are freely accessible and are displayed in curriculum areas. The school has a good range of resources and materials and there is a good quantity of equipment.



The Montessori principles of order and preparation of resources are clear in each classroom due to the careful preparation by the adults. The team work well together in preparing and maintaining the environment; attention to detail in the presentation of the activities is well defined across the school and all adults maintain this throughout the day. Following recommendations made at the first visit the team have reflected upon the whole school's use of space in relation to the needs of the children who currently attend and, through some simple changes to the positioning of the tables and layout of some of the curriculum materials, the space is now much better at meeting all learning and development needs.

The outside area provides a variety of opportunities for all the children to engage and explore; it is well planned and prepared daily. During the morning children can choose to ride bikes or scooters: all children must wear helmets for these activities. Alternatively, a well resourced outside area which extends the child's opportunity for role play, gardening, balance, co-ordination and care of the garden and hens, ensures that the children have opportunities to develop and learn across all environments.

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

The children's independence at the school is very well promoted and is evident during the work cycle where children are confident in, and capable of, accessing all aspects of the environment. Children know where to find their name in order to self-register themselves in the inside and outside areas. Children are aware of their own safety and the risks they can take. They are secure in knowing what they can and cannot do. They find helmets to wear when riding the bikes, open and close doors with ease, remind each other to wash hands when returning from outside, prepare and help themselves to snacks, and ask questions when they need clarification. This was reflected across the whole school at the first re-accreditation visit during which the Grantham Farm children got on with their own lessons, yet when they needed support they asked the teacher to help them recall the discussions from the previous day and together they read the white board which had summarized the points from the previous lesson.

The child's freedom to move, to choose, to repeat, to work alone, in pairs and small groups is possible due to the consistent application of the school's ground rules by the adults. The team members are respectful of each child, each other and towards the environment, and this is clearly reflected in the children's behaviour. The children are respectful, feel secure and are self-assured.

When coming together for the group lunch, the older children are quick to support younger ones in opening lunch boxes and asking them if they have everything they need. Links are made with other Montessori schools around the world through the school project 'Our United Montessori World'; the children, guided by the older Grantham Farm group, have raised money by celebrating 'purple cake day' with a school in New Zealand and have used the money raised to buy materials for a school they communicate with in Botswana.

Parents acknowledge that the school's encouragement of independence gives their children the foundation for a love of learning.



Montessori practice: Classroom management

The length of the morning work cycle, which exceeds three hours, ensures that the children have enough time to work and play spontaneously as well as to participate in planned lessons both inside and out. All adults participate in every aspect of classroom management, including planning, teaching, facilitating, preparing and cleaning the environment. Their role modeling and respect for each other and for the children enables the work cycle to flow undisturbed. All teachers stand back and observe before engaging, redirecting or inviting children to lessons, so that the children are not disturbed during their self-initiated activities.

For the Children's House, termly topic planning feeds into the children's individual plans and next steps, whilst the Grantham Farm group's monthly project planning, which connects to the Eco School vision, is linked to their individual next steps in English, mathematics and science.

The classrooms are planned for vertical grouping, with 2½ to 5 years (the Children's House) placed together and 5 to 7 years and above (Grantham Farm). During the first re-accreditation visit no children under the age of 3 years stayed all day. Whilst none of the children who did stay all day asked to sleep, a quiet area in the classroom is available after lunch should this be necessary.

The team has a variety of checklists detailing routines and important information. The school operates a key person system and parents clearly know who their child's key person is.

Montessori Practice: links with parents, including reports and records

All team members are key people whose role it is to observe, plan for and facilitate the learning and development of a small group of children.

Parents acknowledge the close connection that they have with all the teachers and especially their child's key person. Whilst knowing that they will receive a termly summative report, they highlighted the importance of having the opportunity to speak to teachers informally on a day to day basis, particularly during the child's settling-in period. During this time a daily information sheet goes home and describes what the child has done. The children's annual reports provide detailed information on the progress of the child and, for the children who attend Grantham Farm, include information about their developing attainment in reading, writing, comprehension and mathematics.

The creation of the Eco School committee, which includes parental input, and the parenting group CHUMS (Children's House Understanding Montessori), have helped parents develop high regard for the team and acknowledge the support that they receive.

Since the first re-accreditation visit the parent page linked to the 'My Montessori Child' web based package has been made available. Parents who have started to access their children's own page spoke highly of the information provided and how enjoyable it was to share the photographs and observations with their child at home. With this web-based assessment system observations of the children can be easily made by any member of staff.



Staffing:

Leadership and management are strong, and the regular staff meetings are fully recorded. Annual reviews and appraisals are individualized and focus on all areas of practice including Montessori and the Eco School project. The team have started to reflect regularly on their practice through peer observation and by keeping individual self-reflective journals. At the second re-accreditation visit it was evident that the staff have continued to pull together aspects of their peer observation process and reflect on evaluation of lessons as a team. These are now documented and collated in one document demonstrating their growing professional development. The team should continue this process so that it becomes embedded into practice.

The school regularly reviews its Self Evaluation Form (Early Years) and School Information and Evaluation Form (Independent School) as part of its school development plan and recent initiatives include the introduction of the 'My Montessori Child' assessment package, planning for the outside area, initiating the 'Our United Montessori World' project and the introduction of peer observations. Such initiatives contribute towards sustaining and improving the good practice already delivered at Grantham Farm Montessori School.

A detailed induction procedure is in place. All members of the team hold appropriate childcare or recognized qualifications to teach. Three members, including the owner, hold a Montessori International Diploma and a further member of the team holds Qualified Teacher Status. Staff members are given the opportunity to attend Montessori training and conferences on a regular basis.

The team at Grantham Farm Montessori School successfully provides an environment that lays the foundation for a love of learning which enables each child to make individual progress in meeting their own potential.

Name of Assessor: Dawn Nasser

Date of reports: First visit – 25th May 2014

Second visit – 7th October 2014