



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 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.

Pippins Montessori

Whites Farm, Bures Road, White Colne, Colchester, Essex CO6 2QF

Date of first re-accreditation visit: 30 October 2014

Date of second re-accreditation visit: 6 March 2015

Date of previous MEAB accreditation: June 2011

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

Description of the school

Pippins Montessori opened in 1992 and has been run under the current ownership since 2004. It is located in the rural village of White Colne, Essex. The setting consists of the main building, a converted barn, which houses the pre-school children (aged 3 to 5 years) on the ground floor and the 2 to 3 year olds (toddlers) on a mezzanine, accessed by stairs secured by a gate. This nursery building has adult and child toilets on both the mezzanine and ground floor, a kitchen and the Manager's office.

Baby Pippins (for children up to 2 years of age) opened in 2011. It is in purpose-built premises on the opposite side of the outdoor area from the nursery and consists of an entrance area, staff room and secure main room. Within the main room there is a partitioned sleeping area, nappy changing facilities including a hand wash basin at the child's level, and a small kitchen for the preparation of breakfast, snack, bottles and afternoon tea. Doors open onto a partitioned area of the outdoor space shared with the nursery.

The outdoor area is accessed from the ground floor room of the nursery onto a covered



wooden patio area with tables and shelves. There is also an area of artificial grass, along with sand and water pits and a garden area. A bark chipped area has balancing beams and stepping stones. The whole nursery has access to a long meadow, and there is also direct access to orchards for nature walks.

The setting is open every weekday from 08:00 to 18:00 for 47 weeks of the year. It is registered for 15 children aged 3 months to 2 years and 30 children aged 2 to 5 years, with 82 children currently on roll. Children generally attend for a full day. Morning sessions are available for the nursery children only. On the day of the second visit there were 11 babies, nine 2 to 3 year olds and 11 3 to 5 year olds present, of whom one went home before lunch and one after lunch. A hot lunch is cooked on site daily. The setting supports children with additional educational needs, including those with English as an additional language.

The Manager takes responsibility for the day to day running of Pippins and holds level 4 qualifications in both Montessori pedagogy and early years practice. Thirteen members of staff are appropriately qualified, holding Montessori and other early years qualifications and are employed full time, four members of staff are part time and job share; a cook works every morning and an admin assistant works part time.

Summary

Pippins Montessori is a well managed setting that is committed to providing high quality Montessori education for children aged 3 months to 5 years. Since the previous MEAB accreditation the access to – and provision of learning opportunities in – the outdoor area have increased and staff regularly assess and review the opportunities to enhance learning outdoors. A consistent and detailed procedure for peer review in the form of appraisal and supervision has been implemented to promote the team's continued professional development. This could be further enhanced by developing a culture of observation to inform reviews, from the Manager, room leaders, peer on peer or detailed child observations.

The range of learning and experiences offered at Pippins Montessori is broad. Whilst fulfilling the requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) framework, the nursery focuses on developing practical, sensory, language, numeracy, cultural and creative skills through the Montessori curriculum. At the first re-accreditation visit a recommendation was made that a closer link should be established between the EYFS and the Montessori curriculum in planning, recording and assessment. A review of current practice has taken place with the intention of implementing a new system in the next reporting period.

Through the wide range of activities freely available, children's independence develops alongside their love of work and order, and co-operation is built on mutual respect.



Parents comment on how well the staff know their children and prepare them for transition through the setting and on to school. This team of well qualified and committed staff guides the children throughout the day, encouraging a sense of responsibility and self-discipline through the use of positive language and effective role modeling.

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 with the process already started which will link the EYFS to the Montessori curriculum in planning, recording and assessment; and
- continue to develop a culture of observation and reflective practice throughout the setting.

Philosophy:

Pippins' philosophy is based on promoting children's intrinsic motivation through positive attitudes. The child's individual needs for physical, intellectual and emotional independence are fostered through an environment carefully prepared to meet these needs. By giving the children freedom to make their own choices throughout the day, staff work hard to promote the love of order, the love of work, respect, self-discipline and co-operation.

Independence and initiative is encouraged throughout the setting; children from the youngest to the eldest are confident to try new skills, from blowing their nose or pouring their own drink, to mixing paints and laying the tables for lunch. Staff are always on hand to assist but ensure they give the child time to carry out tasks for themselves.

Pippins' philosophy is defined in the mission statement and aims and objectives included in the parent information pack and on the website. These are reviewed annually by the manager and room leaders.

Daily contact enables staff, parents and carers to share and acknowledge the progress of the children both at Pippins Montessori and at home. Since the first re-accreditation visit more emphasis has been placed on informing parents of Montessori philosophy with regard to child development and celebrating the achievements the children make through working with the Montessori materials, and how these relate to everyday tasks and skills at home.

Through their interaction with all the children, staff at Pippins show that they value every child for their unique characteristics and strive to meet their individual needs



throughout the day.

Learning and Development:

All three rooms are laid out in accordance with the Montessori areas of learning: exercises of everyday living, sensorial, numeracy, language and cultural. Each room has a book corner with a large sofa to share stories.

The open plan arrangement of the baby room allows both early walkers and crawlers freedom to move around and develop independence as they are able to self-select activities from the shelves. An area partitioned off with a clear plastic and wooden screen has a small table and shelving unit which contains a range of early Montessori exercises, for those infants who are nearly ready to transition to the toddler room. Doors at the front of Baby Pippins open onto an enclosed outdoor area, with equipment to develop gross motor skills and opportunities to extend activities from indoors.

The pre-school room also has direct access to the outside area. This has been significantly developed since the last MEAB accreditation, with opportunities for children to take resources outside and to access activities that complement work they may do inside. They can dig, develop gross motor skills and engage in imaginative play. A simple system of a photo board by the door efficiently shows who is outside – as children and staff move between the spaces they add or remove their photo.

The nursery has two work cycles. In the morning the work cycle begins once the children have finished breakfast. Within this time there are many opportunities for child-initiated activities, adult-led activities and small group work. The afternoon work cycle begins immediately after lunch for those children who do not need to sleep.

Each room plans as a team on a monthly basis and it is these activities that are offered in the afternoons, alongside free choice. Individual children are planned for by their key person on a daily basis.

At present, staff members assess children's progress using the EYFS framework. Observations mapped to the framework are placed in the child's Learning Journal alongside photos and next steps planning. On the first re-accreditation visit it was recommended that the Montessori curriculum is linked to the EFYS framework in these Journals, so that they can be used to inform planning for the child's progress in this Montessori environment more effectively and the next steps can be recognized by the parents. The setting has started this process by creating a key to indicate the Montessori areas of the curriculum alongside the key they already use for the EYFS framework. They have informed parents how the new key will work and the changes they will see in their child's Journal. They have also changed the emphasis on the 'Next Steps' report sheet parents receive to include areas of the Montessori as well as the EYFS curriculum.



Pippins has two SENDCo's (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Co-ordinators) who keep up to date with current legislation by regularly attending briefings with the local authority. There is a comprehensive explanation on the website of how Pippins provides for children with additional needs.

Staff members continually review the learning environment to ensure it meets the needs of the children as they progress. The fluidity of movement within the learning areas enjoyed by both staff and children is evidence of the acute awareness staff have of the need to move around to meet the needs of the children.

Prepared Environment: resources and materials

In the baby room, large amounts of floor space enable the crawling babies and early walkers to move around safely. Low level shelving houses baskets of activities readily accessed by the babies. A large, low level round table acts as a focus for small group activities such as mark making in shaving foam. Those able to sit independently also take their meals and snack here. For babies who need extra support low level seats are available. The calm atmosphere in this room helps babies settle quickly.

There is a good range of activities in all rooms. Some of the materials which have been in use since the nursery opened are now looking a little worn. The Manager is aware of this and has planned for the replacement or refurbishment of the most used materials.

The resources available are continually assessed by staff, who have responsibility to oversee and maintain a given area of learning. Within this they plan the resources and activities and ensure the shelves are well maintained and all materials complete and in the correct order. By observing the children they know when to adapt or change the activities available.

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

At Pippins Montessori children are given time to complete their self-chosen tasks. Staff members patiently wait until asked for help, allowing independence to develop and children to foster the ethos of 'help me to help myself'. When children arrive in the morning in the nursery they find their name on a wooden apple and hook it on to the tree painted on the wall. They can then find a photo of themselves and place this next to a photo of the 'job' they would like for the day; such as laying the tables for lunch or sweeping the corridor.

Large name cards are available for children to place next to an activity they are working with if, for example, they wish to return to it after visiting the snack table.



Since the last MEAB accreditation, the toddler room has introduced a system where children can choose to access the outside area at any time in the day. On the wall is a photograph of the outside area. If a child wishes to go outside they will place a photograph of themselves on the photograph of the outside area. Staff will then tell all the children who are going outside and anyone who wishes to is invited to join them. Pippins Montessori has excellent practices in place to foster independence from a very young age.

Staff consistently role model positive behaviour and use language well to reinforce ground rules. Respect is shown to the children by staff who observe and only redirect a child when they feel it necessary for the harmony of the whole group.

Daily contact with parents enables staff to celebrate the achievements of the children. The baby unit has a 'Home Link' diary for each child to ensure that parents have access to daily updates on their child's progress and a brief insight into their day. The nursery has recently introduced a 'going home slip', which informs parents of what the child has eaten and what they have most enjoyed that day. It was recommended at the first re-accreditation visit that this means of communication be enhanced by offering parents suggestions of how they can put into practice at home the skills children are learning at Pippins, and directly linking these skills to Montessori activities. Staff have now changed the format of the 'going home slip' to include 'during my Montessori work cycle I ...' and 'at home I could ...' This has been received extremely positively by staff and parents.

Montessori practice: Classroom management

At Pippins Montessori children are free to choose where they work from the time the work cycle begins at around 09:00. A variety of group activities are offered throughout the week, some as part of the morning and afternoon work cycle. Children can participate in these activities, joining in or choosing another activity whenever they wish. The flexible layout of the pre-school classroom accommodates sessions conducted by peripatetic teachers for dance, music and French, for the whole group if required, whilst maintaining access to materials for those who wish to work alone. Other small group activities such as cooking, art, yoga and science are planned by the room teams as part of their termly topics.

Breakfast is available between 08:00 and 08.30. Drinking water is available in all the rooms. Self-service snack is also available for all from 10:00 until lunchtime and again from 14.00 until tea time at 16.15.

In the pre-school room, children who have placed their photo on the job board set the tables for lunch. They set the cutlery in the middle of the plate, so children can choose into which hand they place their knife and fork when they eat.

Children from the pre-school and toddler rooms choose where they wish to sit to eat, this may be with siblings or peers. Staff sit with the children, encouraging good



manners. A recommendation made at the first re-accreditation visit was to establish a system where children have the opportunity to serve themselves and each other. This has been done. Vegetables and bread are placed in the middle of the table for children to serve themselves, with the main meal served by staff. Pudding is also served by the children. Staff have found that the children now eat far more vegetables and are more adventurous with their choices. When they have finished their meal they take their plates and scrape them, placing their cutlery in a bowl ready for washing up.

Baby Pippins eat all their meals in their own room. Staff gradually increase their opportunities for independence as they become ready to use cups and cutlery.

Meal times at Pippins Montessori are very social occasions. Staff take opportunities to develop grace and courtesy as well as extend learning, as they follow and expand the children's interests through conversation, in sustained shared thinking.

After lunch, children in the nursery who wish to sleep do so in the toddler room on the mezzanine floor. All other children take part in activities in the pre-school classroom. Whilst they are not inhibited by the fact children are sleeping upstairs, they are respectful that this is a time for quiet activities.

In Baby Pippins, sleep time is dictated by the individual child – some will sleep in cots and others in buggies. Nappy changing occurs as and when needed but also after meal times and when a child awakes from sleeping.

The policies and procedures that support effective classroom management are regularly reviewed at team meetings and monthly staff meetings. Staff work hard to meet the individual needs of every child throughout the day, whilst maintaining a regularity of set routines, which helps the children feel secure.

Montessori Practice: links with parents, including reports and records

Staff make brief observations throughout the day, and these are transferred to the child's Learning Journal and mapped to the EYFS framework, with next steps documented in the form of a chart. Parents have access to the Learning Journals during each term and contribute to the next steps chart. Progress is tracked via the Essex Early Years recommended colour wheel. This is a very visual and easy to understand document, where parents can quickly see where their child is against developmental norms. The Learning Journal is much appreciated by parents, and it has been updated with a reference key linking it to the Montessori curriculum.

Where possible, parents and carers have daily contact at drop off and pick up with the child's key person. The 'to and fro Home Link' diary used in Baby Pippins and the 'going home slips' in the nursery, also provide feedback on a child's nutrition, activities and general well being. The child's key person is primarily responsible for their planning and record keeping. In each room all staff work with all the children. A recommendation on



the first re-accreditation visit was that this information was extended to include practical ways parents can develop their child's independence at home. A new format has been established which gives parents information and ideas on how to continue the independence the children have gained at the setting at home. This has been extremely well received by the parents.

The mandatory two year old assessment is used as a transition report for parents as their child moves from the baby room to the toddler room. A comprehensive written report is sent to the child's next school.

Regular newsletters are posted on the website. Once a term parents are invited to participate in events at Pippins such as with Christmas crafts, or sports day. Since the first re-accreditation visit, information evenings have been planned for the parents and a new section on the website and in the newsletter is in progress to include Montessori quotes and definitions. Parents comment on the warm welcome they receive from staff, who are dedicated to providing care for their children in a 'home from home' atmosphere.

Staffing:

Pippins Montessori has a well defined staffing structure and comprehensive job descriptions. A recommendation on the first re-accreditation visit was to review all job descriptions to reflect the ethos of the setting and its stated aims and objectives. This has been achieved and the Manager and room leaders have commented on how this has subtly and positively shifted the whole emphasis and ethos of the staff's practice. The recruitment and induction process is good and the programme for mandatory training is well managed. New staff are monitored and supported by the Manager and room leaders.

Appraisals take place annually for each member of the team, and supervisory meetings with room leaders are undertaken every six weeks. Staff evaluation processes help the Manager, room leaders and other staff to identify areas for improvement, training and professional development. Monthly staff meetings ensure that policies and procedures are kept up to date and enable staff to cascade any training they have received. Weekly team meetings encourage reflective practice: documented evidence of this is still limited but new forms have been devised and staff are developing this skill in small but achievable steps. During the previous MEAB accreditation a system of peer observations had been planned, but implementation of this is still limited. Documented formal observations by the Manager and room leaders are being developed and a system and format that all staff are comfortable with has been devised.

The Manager holds level 4 qualifications in both Montessori pedagogy and early years practice. The room leader of the 3 to 5 year olds has an early years degree and a foundation degree in Montessori pedagogy, as well as Early Years Teacher status. The room leader of the 2 to 3 year olds has a certificate in Montessori pedagogy, CACHE



level 3 childcare qualification and has started a degree in early childhood studies. The room leader for Baby Pippins has a level 3 diploma in early learning and childcare. Of the remaining 13 teaching staff, one has an early years degree, two have certificates in Montessori pedagogy and six hold level 3 early years qualifications. Three have relevant qualifications at level 2 and Pippins Montessori also has three apprentices working towards level 2 qualifications.

Staff at Pippins Montessori are committed to the Montessori approach to education and are keen to maximize and gain from the expertise of more experienced staff members.

Their engagement with the re-accreditation process is a very positive indication of their commitment to provide high quality child care and to look to ways to continue to improve through self appraisal.

Name of Assessor: Denys Lyne

Date of reports: First visit – 3rd November 2014

Second visit – 7th March 2015