



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.

The Sunflower Montessori Nursery School

Causeway Farm, Middleton, Saxmundham, Suffolk IP17 3NH

Date of previous MEAB accreditation: June 2012

Date of first re-accreditation visit: 1 May 2015

Date of second re-accreditation visit: 1 October 2015

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

Description of the nursery

The Sunflower Montessori Nursery is situated in a residential property on a farm in Suffolk. The setting has one large classroom, a kitchen for staff use, and a large, secure garden with a barn, playhouse and a sand area. They have sole use of its facilities.

There are nine members of staff, of whom two have EYP, one has Cert. Ed., one has Level 5, three have Level 4 and one has Level 3, and there is also an apprentice. In addition, four have Level 4 Montessori Diploma and one has the primary Montessori. Staff members have undertaken paediatric first aid training.

The setting offers sessions every morning and afternoon during term times and is open from 08.45 to 15.15. There are currently 42 children enrolled, between the ages of two and four, who attend a variety of sessions throughout the week and on the day of the second visit the school had 26 children attending in the morning and 20 attending in the afternoon, with six staff present. Many children stay the whole day and bring their own packed lunch. Staff are able to cater for children with additional needs.



The nursery is privately owned and was established in January 1991. It is managed by the proprietor who works at the nursery full time, the rest of the team work part time.

Summary

The Sunflower Montessori Nursery School offers a caring Montessori environment. The staff are aware that parents are important partners in providing for each child's individual welfare, learning and development and they welcome the involvement of families by offering regular events and meetings.

The nursery's literature is clear and detailed, providing visitors and parents with a very good understanding of the school, its philosophy and principles. The staff are experienced and enthusiastic practitioners who offer a good range of Montessori materials that are suited to the needs of the children who attend.

The setting has recently started using a secure, web-based recording system. Activity planning is relevant and all members of the staff team contribute to this; planning for individual children is reviewed daily and adopting the new digital learning journey records has made a very significant difference to the quality of the school's record keeping. These now show written evidence of children's achievements using Montessori activities linked to the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) areas of learning and development. In updating its planning, observation and recording processes, the setting has met recommendations made at its previous MEAB accreditation.

The setting places great importance on fostering all areas of children's development, which it encourages through routine daily activities such as snack time and a lot of outdoor activities, where all children within the mixed age group have to show patience and take turns. The school caters well for children with additional needs.

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:

- to continue to reflect upon and develop staff's working knowledge of peer on peer observations; and
- to continue to refresh well-used materials.



Philosophy:

The owner/manager has a very good understanding of Montessori philosophy and is committed to providing a nurturing and genuine Montessori nursery school. The principles and practice of this philosophy are upheld within the setting. The other staff members are also committed to this aim, which is evident throughout their day to day work; they are a very good team who work to cater for all the children's individual needs.

The children are encouraged to learn life skills and to enjoy exploring within the indoor and outdoor environments. They are given the opportunity to express themselves and communicate their needs. Staff help the children engage fully with the Montessori materials, they enjoy self-initiated learning and are not dependent on adult-led activity.

Comprehensive explanation of Montessori philosophy and principles are given in the setting's literature. Montessori's descriptions of the child, the family and the prepared environment are reflected in the provision and parents are considered to be important partners in providing for their child's optimum development.

Learning and Development:

At The Sunflower a full range of Montessori equipment is available for the children throughout the work cycle, with the addition of regular art and craft activities. Outdoor pursuits provide varied learning opportunities, especially those that promote physical development. The work cycle runs for three hours per session, during which time the children enjoy spontaneous, self-initiated learning. The children are well motivated to explore and learn with the Montessori materials and their interests are catered for effectively. The adults are very caring and praise the children appropriately; they give priority to the personal, social, emotional and language development of the children and are able to nurture each individual.

The staff team encourages the children by asking open-ended questions and supports discussions that the children initiate, without taking over the conversation. During the second re-accreditation visit the children were engaged in their topic of 'night', which the teachers then developed by talking about the recently seen 'red moon', thereby giving children opportunities for children to share their own experiences.

Staff work well together in drawing up yearly, termly and weekly plans. Daily individual records are comprehensive and simple to use and a good range of observational techniques are employed using the new digital recording system. Photographs play a significant part in record-keeping for the individual. Effective record-keeping and assessment enables the staff to relate learning and development to areas of the EYFS. The Learning Journey profiles give staff and parents a clear view of a child's current progress and interests; they have online access to these daily and to the regular



assessments that are made using the system.

Prepared Environment: resources and materials

The nursery offers a good range of Montessori materials, covering all aspects of the early years areas of learning, suited to the needs of the children attending.

The staff team maintain a well-ordered prepared environment; it has a homely atmosphere and the children are shown how to look after their classroom. The materials are set out around the room according to areas of the Montessori curriculum. They are systematically arranged from simple to complex, concrete to abstract and are accessible to all the children.

Many of the learning materials have recently been replaced in response to a recommendation made at the first re-accreditation visit. It is recommended that this process continues.

The outdoor provision extends the learning opportunities available indoors and includes equipment such as building blocks, caring for animals, sand and water play, bikes, as well as opportunities for physical games such as ball activities and number games. The garden area has pots for planting and a greenhouse for growing.

The staff place emphasis on self-initiated learning and continue to 'follow the child' in their daily practice and provision of activities.

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

The staff team understands their role in promoting children's independence. The children are guided throughout the work cycle to engage with different activities, and individuals are given the time and opportunity that they need to achieve tasks without adult interference. The team observes and makes changes in the environment to increase opportunities for children's growing independence, and the daily activities encourage this development. The children display good levels of concentration, curiosity, exploration and the willingness to learn; they are also confident and talkative.

Staff use written and verbal contact with parents and carers to help the promotion of children's independence at home. Parents are told what their children are achieving by themselves at the setting and are encouraged to continue this support elsewhere. The parents are using the new digital system to email comments and ask questions, and staff members are happy to support this increased involvement particularly when promoting children's independence.



The adults acknowledge that they need to be positive role models so that the children can learn respect for others. Children are taught positive strategies on how to interact with each other and the setting has a good policy on diversity which is reflected in practice, for example in offering the children a perspective on other cultures and inviting parents/carers in for discussions relating to topics.

Montessori practice: Classroom management

The setting is well organized and managed. Staff use the digital record-keeping system to evaluate closely how they 'follow the child' so that each individual can fulfil their potential. The children are settled in their daily routine. A Montessori work cycle is in place during both morning and afternoon sessions and access to the garden is offered all day.

The children are presented materials and cared for by their key person as well as other adults, which enables each child to get to know the entire team well. New children are settled in well by the staff using the child's interests to distract them and engage them in activities. The setting has a well established and consistent staff team whom the children and parents respect and have a good relationship with. The key persons are also responsible for the record keeping and liaison with parents and carers of their key children.

Children who attend in the afternoon or all day bring in a packed lunch, the staff eat lunch with them and this time is used as a social event for small group discussions and interaction. The children have a snack table available all day and a quiet area where they can rest or sleep.

The nursery makes full use of the benefits of the mixed age grouping. The children are keen to share their knowledge and understanding with each other, for example, the older children help their younger peers to tidy up. The children work individually and in groups throughout the sessions and they are offered art and craft classes and gym as additional activities.

The manager has overall responsibility for the day to day running of the setting and, with the help of staff, its daily routines support very good classroom management. The classroom and garden are kept clean and well looked after.

Montessori Practice: links with parents, including reports and records

Parents are seen as partners in their children's learning and development. They are offered a variety of ways to communicate with the setting, and many opportunities to get involved in activities and events. They are able to learn more about the Montessori



method from the school's termly newsletters, by speaking to staff, and from information on the website.

At the first re-accreditation visit parents commented on feeling welcomed and involved within the school and reported that their children are well cared for. The key person system facilitates regular and specific feedback using both the electronic recording system and the day to day communications with parents and carers. Parents have access to their children's records via the web-based system and have the opportunity to contribute to these records. The nursery prepares written reports at the end of the summer term, which are used as transition records for those moving on to school. It also sends out feedback forms, which give parents the opportunity to share their views.

Staffing:

The staffing structure is efficiently organised. Staff are well qualified, experienced and enthusiastic practitioners. Each member of the team can make a contribution, for example with curriculum ideas and observations of children. In response to a recommendation made following the previous MEAB accreditation and the first re-accreditation visit, the setting has introduced formal peer on peer observations and staff have found this useful in enabling them to reflect fully on individual performance and on the provision as a whole. It is recommended that this practice continues. Annual staff appraisals take place, the staff meet regularly and share their views daily as well; the owner is very 'hands on' within the school.

The process of staff induction is thorough and is carefully monitored. All staff have job descriptions. Training is available and used to support continued professional development; some of this is external training, which helps improve the provision. The staff work very well together and employ good communication skills regarding their daily Montessori practice.

Name of Assessor: Hatice D'Jelal

Date report submitted: Second visit – 07/10/2015