



# **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.

Receiving accreditation carries the expectation that settings will continue to work on the issues highlighted in this report and will remain committed to the ongoing development of their practice. Furthermore, that they will report to the MEAB office any relevant changes such as to premises address, ownership, hours of operation or to the age range of children attending.

### **Willows Montessori Nursery**

Community Centre, Barmoor Lane, Ryton Village, Tyne and Wear NE40 3QP

Date of previous MEAB accreditation: June 2013

Date of first re-accreditation visit: 12 July 2016

Date of second re-accreditation visit: 17 October 2016

**This accreditation is valid until 31 December 2020**

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

#### **Description of the nursery:**

Willows Montessori Nursery was established in 1995 and has been under the current ownership since 2006. It has sole use of part of a village community centre, with four classrooms, a kitchen, a reception area, two storage rooms and a staff room. One of the classrooms is a purpose-built wooden building situated in the grounds of the community centre. The outdoor area has been designed to incorporate a wide range of learning experiences, including looking after chickens, rabbits and frogs.



The setting is open 51 weeks of the year from 07.45 to 18.00 Mondays to Fridays. The children are grouped according to age. The Squirrel and Hedgehog Rooms are for children from 3 months to 24 months, the Fox's Den is for 24 months to 36 months and the Badger Room is for all children above 36 months. There is some flexibility in the grouping, depending on the child's development. The nursery caters for children with additional needs including those who have English as an additional language.

The nursery has 112 children on roll, and is able to accommodate up to 54 children each session. On the day of the second re-accreditation visit, two children under the age of 2 years attended the morning session only, eight attended both sessions and one attended just the afternoon session. Twenty-seven children altogether were present for the morning session in the Badger Room and Fox's Den and 28 in the afternoon, with 22 attending both sessions. Children attending all day or morning sessions only have their meals cooked on the premises.

Willows Montessori Nursery has 21 members of staff. Since the first re-accreditation visit the owner is no longer involved in the day to day running of the setting, it is now run by two managers who job share and attend part-time; one holds a Montessori International Diploma and the other has Early Years Professional Status. Ten members of staff work full-time; ten hold a Montessori qualification and most have a relevant childcare qualification.

## Summary

Willows Montessori Nursery provides a caring and stimulating environment for children to learn and develop in a very good Montessori setting. Children are respected to follow their own interests and provided with plenty of opportunities to explore independently, both indoors and out.

The flexible planning incorporates individuals' interests and enables children to learn in a relaxed, informal manner. Each child's progress is monitored in line with the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) Framework, and their use of Montessori activities is monitored separately.

The staff team has met the recommendations from the previous MEAB accreditation and successfully introduced strategies to encourage more independence. This has allowed children to demonstrate their capabilities and skills more fully throughout the nursery.

An effective partnership with parents and robust policies helps ensure that staff and parents work together to make the children's day educational, enjoyable and stimulating.



***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:***

- provide written information about the Montessori philosophy in the nursery's Introduction Pack, given to parents of new children;
- consider the layout of the Badger Room so that children can have access to the shelves throughout the session, have enough floor space for their activities and therefore have the freedom to engage fully with the materials; and
- fully integrate planning for Montessori activities in the electronic system in all rooms.

#### **Philosophy:**

The Montessori ethos runs through every aspect of the day at Willows. All members of the team have a very good understanding of Montessori principles, which they put into practice by following individual children's interests and inner needs, both indoors and outside.

The nursery's aims and objectives are clearly defined in their prospectus and reviewed annually by the management team. Since the first re-accreditation visit, the owner has developed an excellent new website for the nursery, which explains the Montessori philosophy in detail and acts as an ideal tool for communicating the curriculum and ethos to current and prospective parents. It is recommended that this information is also included in the new parents' Introduction Pack.

#### **Learning and Development:**

The Fox's Den and the Badger Room are set out according to the EYFS areas of learning. Children are able to choose resources both indoors and outside; they have free-flow to the outside area and enjoy the opportunities for spontaneous and adult-led learning throughout the day. Children from the Badger Room are also offered weekly Forest School sessions in the woods nearby, led by staff who are qualified Forest School Leaders.

The Hedgehog and Squirrel Rooms have a range of stimulating materials arranged for easy access by the babies and toddlers. They have free-flow between these two rooms and are encouraged to initiate their own play. There is a good balance of adult-led and



uninterrupted self-chosen activities. Children from both the Hedgehog and Squirrel Rooms are taken outside at least once in both the morning and afternoon sessions, to access the many good opportunities for spontaneous exploration and discovery there.

A three hour work cycle during both the morning and afternoon sessions allows children the freedom to work at their own pace. The outdoor area has been very thoughtfully arranged to allow children freedom to explore and learn outdoors throughout the sessions, in all weather conditions. Children of all ages feel confident choosing activities of interest and play by themselves, or with a group of children, engaging in conversation with their peers and adults. Adults observe from a distance, but are ready to intervene when required. Planned adult-led activities are offered to children indoors and out, and excellent learning opportunities were observed on the days of both re-accreditation visits, such as when a practitioner read the book 'A Tiny Seed' to a group of the Badger Room's children. The adult asked them to think whether the seeds that fell in the ocean, desert or snowy mountain would grow under these different conditions. This discussion turned into a science experiment under the guidance of the adult.

Staff members are familiar with the developmental needs of each child and plan for them accordingly. The recently introduced electronic record-keeping system is now well embedded and the staff team feels very confident in using it to record their daily observations of children's activities. The program identifies the next steps for learning, which are used by key persons to plan for each child. Planning is thorough and covers all areas of learning within the EYFS. Planning for Montessori activities is not fully integrated into this system: in the Fox's Den and the Badger Room these activities are planned for separately and recorded on a sheet. Parents of babies in the Hedgehog Room inform key persons of their child's observed interests and developments at home; this information is usefully integrated into the planning.

Each room's team meets weekly to share their plans for individual children's learning. This involves reviewing what went well previously and incorporating children's interests and next steps into the forthcoming short term weekly plan. These are drawn up using the EYFS Framework and are displayed on the wall for reference. The plans and observations are monitored and evaluated by the room leaders in the Squirrel and Hedgehog Rooms, and in the Fox's Den, and by the managers in the Badger Room. Medium term planning is done for the Fox's Den and the Badger Room only. Termly plans focus on a theme but have the flexibility to be changed according to children's interests.

Mandatory two year old progress checks are carried out by key persons and shared with parents and health visitors. The nursery's Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities Co-ordinator works closely with outside agencies to ensure best outcomes for children with additional needs.

The managers ensure that all data stored in the recording system, as well as information provided on the setting's Facebook page, is kept safe and in line with the setting's e-safety policy. This is good practice.



### **Prepared Environment: resources and materials**

The nursery is set out in four rooms, all of which are well planned, with a range of excellent materials to suit the developmental stages and abilities of the children. Babies and toddlers in the Hedgehog and Squirrel Rooms are free to go from one room to another. Both rooms are equipped with appropriately-sized furniture and a broad range of learning materials, such as a good selection of heuristic baskets, books and blocks in both rooms. Additionally, both have comfortable resting corners with large cushions and soft toys, which double up as sleeping areas when required. The Squirrel Room has a well established role play area with dressing-up clothes, and early Montessori exercises such as pouring, transferring and dressing frames.

The prepared environments in the Fox's Den and Badger Room are good. The shelves are well organised and clean and the activities are age appropriate and appealing. Following a recommendation from the first re-accreditation visit, Montessori activities in the Fox's Den have been made more inviting, encouraging children to explore these materials more. It is recommended that the layout of the Badger Room be changed so that children can easily access the Montessori shelves throughout the session, have enough floor space for their activities and therefore have the freedom to engage fully in their work. The materials should remain ready for use and complete. As well as the Montessori curriculum areas, the rooms have a cosy rest and book corner, building blocks, a well-stocked art corner, a snack table and home corner. The Badger Room also has a water play area.

The nursery has three outdoor areas that are separated by low fencing and gates. One is outside the main building, another is outside the Fox's Den and these are separated by an area used as an allotment, where children plant vegetables and flowers. All outdoor areas are extremely well planned and stocked. They have willow dens, mud kitchens, mark-making areas, climbing areas, and a story corner. The garden outside the Fox's Den also has a greenhouse made from plastic bottles, a frog pond, a rabbit hutch and fire pit. Children help look after their environment by watering plants in the greenhouse and feeding the rabbits. The garden outside the main building houses hens whose eggs the children collect and count. The gates between the three outdoor areas are opened to allow the children free access to all the resources. This promotes many opportunities for investigation, well supporting the children's spontaneous learning and opportunities to share their discoveries with adults

Both the outdoor and indoor environments are kept well maintained by the members of staff, who gently remind children to tidy away if necessary. Willows Montessori Nursery makes outstanding use of the space, both indoors and outdoors, to create an environment that is inviting, attractive and able to serve the needs of every child.



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

Children are encouraged to develop their independent skills throughout the setting. Staff members' trust and respect for the child allows even the youngest children to carry out tasks for themselves with confidence. Children acquire more independence as they progress from room to room. In the Badger Room for example, they help set up tables for lunch, fold face cloths to be used by the little diners after lunch and tidy away their own crockery and cutlery.

There is a snack area open for children for half an hour in the mornings and again in the afternoons. Children have toast or crumpets, bananas and apples which they help prepare in the Fox's Den and Badger Room. When they are able, they pour their own drinks and tidy up after finishing. Independence in personal hygiene is also fostered very effectively.

Children respect the materials, using them with care and returning them to the shelves. Adults gently remind the children to clear up after themselves if required. Children show respect for each other, waiting patiently for their turn during group games, sharing materials outside and listening to each other during conversations. On the day of the first re-accreditation visit, a small group of children were playing with a basket of flat stones which had pictures drawn on them (such as a happy face on one side and a sad face on the other, a picture of a tree on one side and a river on the other). With the option to choose either side, the stones were used by the children to build a story, each one continuing on from what the previous child had said. This was achieved with gentle guidance from a practitioner.

Parents report that they are pleased with the independence that their children are developing at home. Following recommendations from the first re-accreditation visit, parents are now provided with a comprehensive booklet detailing many activities that can be done to promote Montessori practice at home. They have also benefitted from a Montessori workshop which was organised by the team and comment that they would welcome further opportunities like this on a regular basis.

### **Montessori practice: Classroom management**

Strong teamwork and a well-managed staff rota enable the adults to provide a stimulating environment where children can access both spontaneous and planned activities throughout the day. There is an effective key person system in place to help ensure children's needs are met. All the practitioners in each room contribute to its children's learning, with records being kept up to date by key persons.

The morning work cycle for the whole setting is at least three hours long. Children start from 07.45 and can have breakfast. The children in the Fox's Den and Badger Room



come together for circle time and then help set tables for lunch, which begins at 11.45. Staff members sit with the children and make this a sociable occasion. After lunch, children help tidy away their crockery and cutlery and have the opportunity to go outside or carry on with activities indoors. In the Hedgehog and Squirrel Rooms, lunch is also served at 11.45.

Children attending only the morning session leave at 13.00, when those attending afternoon sessions begin arriving. Snack is available from 14.45 onwards and the end of the work cycle is marked with circle time at 16.30. Children staying till 18.00 have their tea after the group before continuing with their choice of activity.

The adults support children of all ages sensitively and respectfully with, for example, children's movement from indoors to outdoors appearing seamless. The children in the younger two rooms benefit greatly from adult-led activities. Nursery policies and procedures are evaluated regularly and altered if necessary to ensure that every child's day is educational, enjoyable and stimulating.

### **Montessori Practice: links with parents, including reports and records**

Partnership with parents is strong. New parents receive a comprehensive prospectus which includes the setting's aims and objectives, policies, and explanation of the EYFS Framework. It is recommended that they also receive information on the Montessori philosophy in their Introduction Pack.

Parents drop off and pick up their children from their classrooms. This gives them opportunities to exchange information informally with their child's key person. A whiteboard outside the Badger Room and Fox's Den informs parents of activities children have done indoors and out during both the morning and afternoon sessions. In the Hedgehog and Squirrel Rooms, parents and practitioners share a home/nursery diary which is completed daily. All parents are given a 'Me, My family, My World' booklet to fill in and share with the nursery on a regular basis. Children are encouraged to talk about the photographs and events that families have contributed to the booklet.

Willows Montessori Nursery holds two parent evenings a year to discuss the progress of each child. A very informative newsletter is emailed regularly to parents. The nursery has also set up a Facebook page for parents to share information and to network with each other. This page is a 'closed group' for added security.

All children have a Learning Journey record which is shared with parents. This well presented book records the children's development and references against the developmental stages set out in the EYFS.

There are many opportunities for parents to get involved at the nursery throughout the year. A fundraising event is held annually, a recent example being 'The Big Toddle'



where parents, children and staff got together to raise money for charity. The nursery celebrates school leavers day with a graduation ceremony at their annual summer fair in the grounds. Prior to that, all school leavers are taken to a 'Build a Bear' workshop where they make their own leaving present.

Transition from room to room and when leaving the setting is managed very well. In the Badger Room, the children leaving the nursery have pictures of their new school displayed on a board, along with photographs of all the children currently at the setting who are going to that school. Teachers from these schools are invited to visit the nursery. A 'Tracker' is prepared which details children's progress with the EYFS developmental guidelines and this is forwarded to the new setting or school.

Parents speak highly of the nursery, praising the commitment of staff and expressing pride in the progress their children have made since starting there. They appreciate the key persons' knowledge of their children and benefitted from the recent Montessori workshop.

### **Staffing:**

All staff members hold relevant childcare qualifications except for three apprentices and one other practitioner. Four of the team have Early Years Professional/Teacher Status and three are trained as Forest School Leaders. Eleven members of the team work part-time, including the managers. However, effective communication enables staff to provide continuity of care for every child. Following a recommendation from the first re-accreditation visit, the nursery now has a named deputy on the premises at all times when neither of the managers is present in the setting. The staff team works to a rota system, understanding their roles and responsibilities.

Upon starting their employment, staff members are given a comprehensive handbook which includes an explanation of the Montessori principles and ethos, the EYFS Framework and policies and procedures. The well thought out induction procedure, and clear performance management and structure, enable high standards to be maintained. Staff members have three-monthly supervision meetings, annual appraisals and a well-established peer to peer observation system. The managers have a robust professional development plan in place for each staff member, and they speak highly of the managers' support in gaining further training and qualifications. The leadership team are very committed to providing Montessori training for staff members. Regular in-house training is delivered by professionals from Montessori Centre International. Staff members are encouraged to attend workshops and local Montessori training days, and the setting recently held a Montessori practical workshop, which was attended by some of them. This enthusiastic team is committed to providing high quality education and care for the children attending Willows Montessori Nursery.





Name of Assessor: Raju Surelia

Date report submitted: First visit – 12 July 2016

Second visit – 17 October 2016