



# **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 2012 revisions. The second visit sought to assess the progress made on the recommendations set out in the report from the first 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.

### **Footprints Montessori Day Nursery**

Long Reach, West Horsley, Surrey KT24 6LZ

Date of the first re-accreditation visit: 15 March 2013

Date of the second re-accreditation visit: 24 July 2013

Date of previous MEAB accreditation: November 2009

This accreditation report relates to the provision for children aged birth to five years.

#### **Description of the school**

Footprints Montessori Day Nursery is situated on a working farm and is a conversion of four farm buildings. The premises comprise a large reception area including an office, staffroom and adult toilets, off which there are four distinct rooms.

At one end there is a baby room upstairs for children up to 16 months old and a toddler room downstairs for children aged 16 months to 2 years old, which has direct access to a secure outside space designated for their sole use. Between the toddler room and reception is a kitchen/dining room. Sited at the other end of the reception area is a hallway, utilized as a cloakroom, with a large classroom at either end and toilets for the older children. The classrooms are split between children aged 2 to 3½ years old and those aged 3½ to 5 years old. There is a large outdoor area called the 'big garden' which is accessible from the older children's classroom.

The outside space for children aged two and under comprises an artificial grass lawn with surrounding border plants, a playhouse, sandpit, water tray and benches. The large outdoor area for children aged over two contains a wide variety of climbing equipment on a woodchip base, a large soft safety surfaced area, a grassed lawn with a raised bed, and a pebbled area. There is also a very spacious, open fronted storage shelter used to store equipment and materials. Adjacent to the classrooms for the 2 to 3½ and 3½ to 5 year olds there are also two separate outdoor spaces accessible from the respective classrooms. One area comprises a small shelter and tables/chairs on a brick patio, whilst the other is a tarmac area containing tables, chairs, a sandpit and gross motor activities. Both are equipped with classroom materials on a



daily basis and these are varied by staff.

Footprints Montessori Day Nursery offers a mixture of both full and part time places for 51 weeks of the year. Children under three are required to attend full day sessions, those over three may attend half day sessions. Whilst some children attend full time, the majority attend for three days per week. On the day of the second re-accreditation visit there were 54 children in attendance during the morning session, and 55 during the afternoon, with 18 members of staff present including the chef, principal and manager. There are 102 children currently on roll and up to 62 children can attend at any one time. The nursery is open between 8.00 and 18.00 on Monday to Friday and provides breakfast, lunch and tea. Both lunch and tea are cooked on site; children do not bring packed lunches from home.

The school is capable of providing for children for whom English is an additional language, and for those with special educational needs (SENs).

The setting was established in 2005 by the current owner who is also the Principal of the nursery. There are 21 staff employed, of whom 18 work directly with the children and most are full time; seven staff hold Montessori diplomas, four have degree qualifications and 11 hold a level 3 qualification in childcare. The Principal is amongst those who are Montessori qualified and also has a degree in Early Childhood Studies.

## Summary

Footprints Montessori Day Nursery wholeheartedly adheres to the principle of 'following the child'. This is a strength of the setting as it applies this approach towards all the age groups, towards how the environment is set up, and to the activities that are provided.

Children are able to experience risk-taking in a well managed and supportive environment. Self-initiated learning is available for children throughout the day alongside good quality, adult-led activity. Following the first re-accreditation visit, free-flow to the outdoors is now available for all the children aged 16 months to 5 years old. The children demonstrate good levels of development, partly due to the consistent approach to learning that is taken across the whole setting. Staff are patient and respectful of children's choices, and they trust them to take their own learning paths.

Since the previous MEAB accreditation the setting has developed the toddlers' room to ensure that they are able to self-select activities, and it has improved the record keeping systems to inform the planning process more effectively. Planning and record keeping are now of very good quality, and the child is always taken as the starting point when considering their next steps in development. Children are supported by an enabling environment that contains a broad range of easily accessible materials of excellent quality.

The work cycles give children both the time and freedom to explore and concentrate on their own interests, and to develop their independence. This independence is being further supported for the 2 to 3½ year olds through the introduction of self-service during mealtimes and washing up their crockery and utensils when finished.

The management of the classrooms is very good, and a flexible staffing structure ensures that all children can have their needs met. The relationships with parents are excellent, with daily feedback given by knowledgeable adults. The strong and dedicated leadership provides



a learning environment for both staff and children, and a setting where children thrive in a natural and joyful way.

***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 consider further opportunities for children's' independence.

#### **Philosophy:**

Footprints Montessori Day Nursery clearly believes in and operates according to the principle of 'following the child'. Each room is set up and run in such a way as to allow children to develop as individuals, following their own interests and unique paths of development.

For younger children up to the age of 2 years old there are no set times for sleeping. Individuals' sleep patterns are respected, and children who are awake whilst others are sleeping are able to operate fully within the classroom.

Risk-taking is encouraged within all classrooms. It begins in the 'Flopsy Bunnies' room which is for babies up to 16 months. Here, movement is encouraged through the provision of equipment that supports gross motor development, and heuristic materials help develop fine motor control and enhance sensory perception. Children are given time to explore these surroundings, and are supported in choosing their own activity. The concept of 'following the child' is carried through very capably in this room, with attentive staff who know the children well being able to quickly meet changing needs.

In the 16 to 24 months old 'Tiggywinkles' room the children enjoy a wide range of equipment that is freely accessible for them. They engage in self-initiated activity and are guided in the cycle of activity and returning materials to shelves for others to use. In this room the children are introduced to activities that support care for the environment.

This emergent self-discipline is also evident in the 2 to 3½ year olds 'Puddleducks' room. Children here are able to practice their self-discipline frequently as they have both the freedom to explore in their environment, and the trust of the staff to operate within it. The recent development of a dedicated outdoor space, and the introduction of free-flow to and from it during the work cycles, has greatly benefited children here. The range of their activities and the high levels of enthusiasm amongst the children are indicators that individual needs are being met.

Children aged between 3½ and 5 years old are in the 'Nutkins' room. They are also able to operate with a great degree of freedom and they benefit from free-flow between indoors and outdoors during the work cycles. During this time they are able to select work of their own choosing, and naturally operate in a caring fashion towards each other and their environment.

Staff support children in all rooms to develop their independence and since the first re-accreditation visit there has been a particular improvement in provision for children in the Tiggywinkles room through the introduction of free-flow movement between the indoors and outdoors during the work cycles.



The principles that the day nursery follows are clearly stated within the prospectus and on the website of the setting, as well as in a parent handbook. These are reviewed annually.

### **Learning and Development:**

Each classroom is organised by areas of learning. In the baby room they have gross motor movement equipment, a book area and a heuristic area. There is room for babies to crawl, sit up and cruise on both carpet and soft mats and rugs. Babies follow their own interests, supported by staff who are sensitive to the needs of the children in their care.

The toddler classroom encourages self-initiated activity, with the provision of open shelving and accessible materials. Focused adult-led activities take place, although children are free to work independently with other materials if they prefer. The work cycles run for up to 2½ hours, although there is a break for snack during this time. Access to the outside is available either before or after the work cycle takes place and, since the first re-accreditation visit, children can now also choose to go into their garden on a free-flow basis during the morning and afternoon sessions. To help the children's independence during their transition between in and outside, the introduction of pegs or a similar system to pair up their shoes would be beneficial.

The children in the older classrooms also benefit from a 2½ hour uninterrupted work cycle in the morning and a slightly shorter cycle in the afternoon; they have free and independent access to a snack table. Adult-led and self-chosen activities take place during the course of the sessions, and both of these older classes have the opportunity for spontaneous learning inside and outside during the work cycles, enjoying access to their own respective outdoor areas adjacent to their classrooms. Due to the physical limitations of the building, the 2 to 3½ year olds have a set time to access the larger shared outdoor garden together as a whole class. This takes place at the beginning of the morning session to ensure that they are still able to experience a full 2½ hour work cycle when they have all returned to the classroom.

In all classrooms there is a consistent approach of 'following the child' as the guide to practice. Planning is based on observations of the children, it is individual for each child and their next steps are updated weekly. Children's achievements are recorded on a weekly observation and assessment sheet and this information is then transferred to their Montessori Record of Activities and, if appropriate, highlighted on their Early Years Foundation Stage Framework Record. Photographs and notes are kept together with these records in one single Record Book for each child.

Staff in each room have the opportunity to reflect on their provision in relation to its use by the children, and to make plans to improve their environment and materials according to changing needs. Specific support is offered to children with special educational needs..

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

The environment is arranged sympathetically in each classroom to best enable the free movement and access to materials for all children. In each room it is clear that the activities on offer are organised into distinct areas of learning, and are all placed within open shelving or on low surfaces to enable their easy contact with and use by children.

The range of resources and materials in each room is excellent and well-matched to the



children's development and learning needs. The babies have a very wide variety of materials on offer, with the support of mats, soft seating and cruising aids to give opportunities at differing physical and developmental levels. Low mirrors, treasure baskets, mark-making materials and books feature alongside clothing to dress up in, light and sound toys and teddy bears.

The quality of resources is very good. They are complete and ready for all children to use, and are clearly appealing. For example, in the toddler classroom, one child became engaged with a 'hobby horse' and both played with and talked about his activity in a natural and joyful way.

Outside the high quality continues in the garden areas, with a well built 'adventure playground', strong wooden seating, a very broad range of equipment to develop motor control, and gardening and woodworking resources. In the toddlers' outdoor space there is a sand pit, water tray, gross motor activities, cars and trikes.

Within the classrooms the children are able to work on the floor or at tables, and there is ample space for either choice. The amount of resources is sufficient for the number of children in each classroom at any one time.

Staff and children work together to maintain the environment. Alongside the checks made on materials to ensure appropriateness for use, staff support children in taking care of the environment through the use of dustpans, brushes, sponges and cloths.

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

Independence is fostered for all children through the provision of a work cycle in both the morning and the afternoon. The morning cycle lasts for 2½ hours, the afternoon cycle for around 2 hours as tea is taken at 16.00. This provides appropriate experience for children who may only attend during afternoon sessions. In the baby room the staff are sensitive to meeting immediate needs through the provision of activity and interaction when it is required, and facilitating rest or sleep as needed during the whole day.

Children based in the rooms for over 2 year olds also benefit from having a freely accessible snack table during their classroom sessions, taking snack and a drink when they wish and cleaning up afterwards.

The children aged 3½ to 5 years old are able to engage in free flow between the inside and outside areas. This feature is now also in place and benefiting the 16 to 24 month old children and the 2 to 3½ year old children, using the outdoor spaces that are directly accessible from their classrooms.

During lunchtimes the oldest children serve themselves food and drink, and are able to wash up their crockery after finishing. The children aged 2 to 3½ years old have been able to further their independence during breakfast time as there is now provision for them to serve themselves breakfast cereal and drinks and engage in washing their crockery and utensils up after eating. At lunchtimes this age group is also able to serve themselves from salad and vegetable platters, and pour their own drinks.

Deep respect is shown by the staff towards the children through the flexibility of planning and provision, the language that is used with the children and by adhering to the premise of taking



care of it by returning activities to their set places and cleaning up after themselves. Respect for others is promoted through group role play and ground rules are reinforced appropriately.

Daily feedback is given to parents from their child's key person, or from their key buddy if the key person is absent. This is the main method that staff utilise to pass on information about individual progress and how this can be supported at home.

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

Classrooms are managed efficiently, ensuring all children are provided for in a flexibly by each group of staff. The setting provides a mixture of both planned activities, delivered by an adult to individuals or small groups, and opportunities for spontaneous learning that comes from the children and their interaction with materials.

Adults are careful to ensure that when they are delivering a focused activity the child is given the choice of taking part or not. The length of the work cycles ensures that there is enough opportunity for children to concentrate for extended periods of time and to experience a wide range of activities. The youngest children are supported with their choices, and in their physical movement around the setting.

Following the first re-accreditation visit the setting implemented timetabled sessions for children in one room to visit the next classroom once a week. When it is close to the time that the individual child will make the transition to the older room they are supported through individual visits and time spent with their new key person. The children aged 2 and over are able to experience shared time together in the large outdoor area.

Three of the classrooms have lunch in their room, supervised well by staff. The 2 to 3½ year olds take lunch in the dining room, and the key persons from their classroom supervise them.

In the babies' room there are two partitioned areas with cots for sleeping. These areas are darkened and offer some degree of soundproofing for the benefit of both sleeping and active children. If children are unhappy sleeping in these areas they are able to sleep within the main room, as mats and beds are also available.

The toddler room offers beds for sleeping within the main room that can be taken out and put away individually as required. Older children are able to rest or sleep as required after lunch, and children who do not wish to sleep are supported in quiet activity whilst others rest.

There are clear policies in place to guide staff in the management of the classrooms, and these are followed diligently.

A wide range of additional activities are offered to the children. From 16 months upwards children can take part in yoga and in zoo therapy, which involves a trained therapist introducing a variety of tame animals for the children to interact with. Up to the age of 2 years they take part in Jo Jingles Music sessions, over the age of 2 years both dance and 'Fit and Fun' exercise and activity sessions are offered. Children over 3½ years old also receive French lessons. Children are also able to go on woodland walks, and the setting offers some time outside for all the children at least once per day.



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

The setting operates a key person system, with that named person being responsible for the record keeping for, and welfare of, their children. There is also a key buddy system, which ensures each child has an allocated adult in the event of absence or a change in sessions attended. This enables staff to build sound relationships with children and their parents, and to use their knowledge of the child to give informed feedback. Some of the planned 'next steps' that are based on observations may be completed at home, which are shared with parents and easy to replicate.

Whilst the key person has responsibility for the record keeping, all adults are able to make observations and meaningful comments about any child. Reports are written by the key person, and parents' evenings are held for all families. Transition reports are also written when children are moving between classrooms, and when they are leaving the setting.

Parents report that they are very happy with the ways the setting enables independence and that their children are very happy to attend. They cite the calm, organised and professional nature of the setting as being a key feature, along with the way their children are "supported and not pushed". They appreciate the daily feedback, the organised talks and parents' evenings, as well as the access they have to the child's Record Book.

### **Staffing:**

The setting is well led by the Principal, supported by a strong leadership team. Each room has a designated 'room leader' and the hierarchical structure of the organization is clear. The Principal has a strong focus on delivering provision in line with the Montessori philosophy. The carefully considered development plan ensures continued progress of the setting.

The staff are well qualified: seven out of the 18 staff who work with the children hold the International Montessori Diploma, and 11 are trained to at least level 3 in childcare.

Staff benefit from clear job descriptions and a clear induction procedure. Staff meetings are held regularly and are attended by all staff. These meetings are planned out in advance, and include both organisational issues and in-service training.

Staff are prepared to make changes in their practice and routines for the benefit of the children, taking decisions to provide better opportunities and to improve experiences for all at the setting.

Continued professional development is provided for all staff. The setting has systems in place for both regular supervision from room leaders, and annual appraisal from the Principal. There are also weekly half hour 'room' observations carried out by the Principal which are used to inform both the development plan and supervision/appraisals.

The staff body all work as an effective team, providing children with a supportive environment that develops both their independence and natural character. Adults respect children and this is seen through all aspects of their work, providing them with the best opportunity to fulfil their unique potential.



Name of Assessor: Jeremy Clarke

Date of reports: First visit – 18<sup>th</sup> March 2013

Second visit – 24<sup>th</sup> July 2013