



# **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.

### **Alderley Day Nursery**

Congleton Road, Nether Alderley, Cheshire SK10 4TD

Date of previous MEAB accreditation: November 2012

Date of first re-accreditation visit: 5 October 2015

Date of second re-accreditation visit: 28 January 2016

This accreditation report relates to the provision for children from birth to 5 years.

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

Alderley Day Nursery was established in 2007 in the village of Nether Alderley, and is a privately owned purpose-built nursery. It consists of five main rooms, which include Baby 1, for babies under 12 months, and Baby 2, for babies from 12 to 18 months (together these rooms comprise the Baby Suite), a spacious Toddler Room (for children aged 18 months to 3 years), which has a small sensory room opposite, and a large Pre-School Room (for 2½ to 5 year olds). There is also a kitchen, staff room, office, art storage room, a laundry and utility room. These are accessible from the main corridor of the building.

A covered walkway, which spans the length of the building, is used as an area for the children to change into outdoor clothing and leads into the very spacious outdoor area. This includes a large, fenced, soft surface playground with a bike track area, a large grassed garden, a fenced vegetable plot, a sensory area, climbing equipment, a chicken enclosure, a role-play house and mud kitchen. A raised stage platform is used for outdoor performances and contains a walk-in sandpit. Two storage sheds house additional resources and another contains a broad range of Montessori materials for outdoor use. The Baby Suite has its own access to a specially designed garden with



artificial grass, a decked area, swing, slide and storage shed. The nursery is situated on the edge of a working farm and all the children can take advantage of its rural position through observing the animals and farm vehicles.

Alderley Day Nursery is open between 08.00 and 18.00 all year round. The manager, who joined the nursery when it was first established, assists the owner in running the setting. The manager and two other staff hold Montessori diplomas, the owner has a BSc. There are 24 other staff members who mainly work full time, five of whom are working towards a Montessori qualification. All these staff members hold relevant qualifications, including three with early years' degrees and two with Early Years Teacher Status. A chef is employed to provide all meals and snacks. Milk feeds are prepared by staff in the Baby Suite. A grounds person and cleaner are also employed.

The nursery is registered for a maximum of 62 children under the age of 8 years. At the second visit there were 108 children on roll in the age range of birth to 5 years, 51 were present for the morning and the afternoon session. Babies generally attend from about 9 to 10 months and there were six under 2 year olds present on the day of the visit. There were 17 staff working and the nursery manager and owner were present. The setting supports children with special educational needs and/or disabilities and children for whom English is an additional language.

## **Summary**

Alderley Day Nursery is a spacious and well-designed Montessori setting. It is light and airy and has impressive facilities for both indoor and outdoor learning. It is led by an experienced and highly organised management team, most of whom have been involved with the nursery since it was established. The team has a clear vision for the nursery's development and strives for excellence. There are thorough appraisal and review processes in place and the management team recognises the value of continued professional development for all staff. Consequently, staff are very aware of their roles and responsibilities and show commitment and strong teamwork across the nursery. Children are happy, busy and trusted under their care. Parents speak highly of the open communication and friendly staff at the nursery and comment positively in particular about the range of outdoor learning experiences available for their children.

Since the previous MEAB accreditation the management team has provided opportunities for staff to enhance their knowledge of Montessori philosophy through enrolment in formal diploma courses and through continued and appropriate in-service training. Since the first re-accreditation visit the opportunities for creative and language development have been very effectively enhanced in each room through the introduction of natural resources, home-made activities and story boards.



***The school provides an education in accordance with the principles of the Montessori approach and environment and merits accreditation by the Montessori Evaluation and Accreditation Board.***

- The nursery should continue to maintain its commitment to the professional development of its staff in order to ensure that the high Montessori standards are maintained.

### **Philosophy:**

Alderley Day Nursery offers an excellent Montessori environment. The aims and objectives of the nursery are clearly laid out in the Operational Plan and in the informative Parent Information Pack. These focus on the Montessori principles and philosophy adopted at the nursery and outline the main areas of a Montessori class. This documentation is regularly reviewed and updated by the management team.

Children are free to follow their interests throughout the work cycle and are given good opportunities for self-initiated learning and teacher-led planned activities. Staff are adept at following the child through careful observation, planning activities based on children's interests, both inside and outside, and through the continual review of a child's development and learning. Staff take turns to create flexible weekly plans which are displayed clearly in the classrooms and these are easily adapted in response to children's interests. Since the first re-accreditation visit staff have had specific training in Montessori principles; they now have very good practical knowledge of these principles and show good understanding of the approach. They work effectively with parents and, if necessary, outside agencies to help develop the unique potential of each child.

### **Learning and Development:**

The nursery offers excellent opportunities for learning and development across all areas of the inside and outside environment. All staff are actively involved in the planning process and they are adept at ensuring that this is done with regard to the Montessori areas of learning and the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), and to any additional needs. Planning is a strength of the nursery as it incorporates reflections and evaluations and room supervisors complete a monthly 'Enabling Environments' form to evaluate the use of resources.

Key persons ensure individual planning and next steps in learning are clearly documented on the web-based recording system along with observations of the child. This information system is used to track a child's progress and areas of interest and ensures all areas of their development are considered. Confidentiality is maintained through private login and passwords for parents and staff. The management team undertakes regular and thorough supervisions, appraisals and training to support staff in the effectiveness of the learning and development provision. This is reflected in the high



quality of care and education that they offer as well as the range of resources and activities to stimulate children's exploration, discovery and progress.

In the Pre-School and Toddler Rooms the daily work cycles last for about three hours and opportunities are given for spontaneous and adult-led activities. In the Baby Suite these are shorter due to babies' sleeping patterns. Children throughout the nursery are trusted to work independently, selecting activities of their choice or working in small or whole class groups. They all have the opportunity to play in the very well-resourced outdoor area and deepen their knowledge of flora and fauna through tasks such as collecting eggs and growing vegetables or herbs. Following lunch, the younger children are encouraged to sleep or rest and those who do not are free to select activities in or outdoors.

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

All rooms in the nursery are extremely well organized and there is an excellent selection of high-quality and well-chosen Montessori and additional resources to support learning and development in all the age groups. Since the first re-accreditation visit, many natural resources and activities have been added in each room to enhance opportunities for exploration and creative development. In the Toddler Room, for example, there is a very good array of planned sensory experiences and natural resources to develop curiosity and stimulate creativity. Language development has also been further supported through the addition of story boards and sacks as well as home-made interactive boards. In the Pre-School Room additional natural resources and daily 'messy play' activities have been added to enhance opportunities for exploration and discovery and build on children's knowledge of the natural world. A 'vintage shop' using real money supports mathematical development and is very popular, with children showing understanding of basic counting.

In both the indoor and outdoor environments, the materials are easily accessible and arranged in an attractive and well thought out manner. Inside, there is sufficient space to allow children to work at small tables or on mats on the floor. The sensory room provides an excellent space for quiet reflection, exploration and comfort, with beautiful and developmentally appropriate sensory resources.

The outdoor environment and its resources offer very many diverse opportunities, such as taking care of chickens and the growing and tending of fruit and vegetables. These activities are incorporated into planning and the daily life of the nursery and offer extremely rich learning experiences that fit well with Montessori principles, especially regarding the interdependence of all living things. Outdoor cycle tracks, the large sandpit and climbing apparatus offer many opportunities for physical activity and imaginative play is also very well provided for.

Staff are very professional, they take pride in their classrooms and are dedicated to providing for and extending children's learning. Since the first re-accreditation visit, they



have brainstormed ideas and rearranged rooms to create very attractive and engaging Montessori spaces. The additional resources have greatly enhanced the children's learning opportunities; they have helped generate a calm and purposeful atmosphere and added to the beauty of each room.

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

Children's independence is strongly fostered throughout all rooms at the nursery. They are given time and freedom to choose activities both indoors and outdoors and they are aware of, or gently reminded about, ground rules.

Children show independence from the moment they enter the nursery as they confidently change shoes, hang coats on named pegs and select breakfast cereals. They are encouraged to select activities spontaneously and complete a cycle of activity by tidying up after themselves and replacing activities, so that these are ready for the next child.

Since the first re-accreditation visit the additional indoor resources and changes to room layouts have enhanced the opportunities to enable independence to flourish. In the Pre-School Room, children may select a classroom chore to undertake independently each day by placing their name next to a picture of that task.

In the Toddler and Pre-School Rooms children serve themselves with snack both in the morning and afternoon, and in the Baby Suite adults gently support the infants during snack and meal times, yet encourage free choice and allow time for the babies to do as much as they can. At lunch time there are excellent opportunities for the older children to show independence as they help themselves to food, carry plates to the table and scrape their plates and replace their cutlery. Staff sit with children during meal times and act as excellent role models by encouraging respect, good manners and offering the opportunity to develop language skills.

Staff are adept at using information from observations to plan for the next steps in each child's development. They work very well as a professional team to facilitate children's independence. Rigorous self-evaluation procedures ensure consistency and predictability of routines for the children. Daily discussions enable parents to feel informed about how to encourage independence at home and the recent launch of the web-based recording system has strengthened these lines of communication further. At induction, families are given a DVD and publication about the Montessori approach, and an excellent termly newsletter – 'The Informant' – gives information about Montessori practices at nursery and at home. Regular coffee mornings and special events ensure parents have plenty of opportunities to learn about the Montessori approach and how to extend their children's independence.



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

Classroom management throughout the nursery is excellent; rigorous and thorough policies and procedures have been developed and are regularly reviewed by the management team so that monitoring the quality of care and of the learning provision is always prioritised. Regular supervisions, weekly meetings of staff in each class and self-evaluative procedures ensure all team members are aware of their roles and dedicate themselves to meeting children's learning and developmental needs. Throughout the nursery, specific training and reflective practices such as staff members' use of 'The Enabling Environments' form help ensure that the adults genuinely allow children to follow their own interests. Staff are adept at keeping plans highly flexible in order to reflect children's needs and current interests. For example, a topic about Europe arose from a child who had visited Majorca. There is a key person system in place, staff know the children very well and they happily take turns to plan activities or topics. In the spacious Toddler Room and in the large Pre-School Room, children are grouped by age and are able to work with any adult in each room.

The staff and management team work very well together to help ensure that all toddler and pre-school children are provided with a morning and afternoon work cycle of about three hours. There is a good balance of adult-led planned activities and opportunities for spontaneous learning, both inside and outdoors. The Baby Suite children are given plenty of time to explore their indoor environment and their soft-surface outdoor area, with many opportunities for sensory play.

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

Alderley Day Nursery has strong links with families and parents speak highly of the friendly and open communication that they have with staff. The child's key person maintains assessment records although all staff may make observations of any child. Staff rotas are set so that continuity of care is offered by key persons; however, daily records on the online system are used to enable any member of staff to report back to parents anything of note, such as sleep and feeding routines.

The online recording system is used very effectively in accordance with Montessori principles and is popular with staff as it supports their Montessori practice. They use it to plan for the next steps in children's learning and to record any trends in their learning across the curriculum. The management team allows staff non-contact time to complete the children's records and rigorously assess the quality of observations and learning provided. One staff member has the role of providing support for the use of the online system across the setting; this responsibility is carried out very proficiently. The system is also praised by families as it gives an immediate snapshot of their child's progress; parents speak highly of being able to access their child's on-line records at any time and upload any observations made at home. Each child's record includes a portfolio of their work, their EYFS and Montessori learning profiles, as well as further ideas on how



parents can support Montessori practices at home, and links to information about the wider Montessori community.

There are many other opportunities for families to learn about their child's progress or to be involved in the nursery, such as twice yearly Parent/Teacher Meetings or Coffee Mornings. There is a very good website, an informative newsletter is regularly produced and specific Montessori information sheets are given to parents on a regular basis.

The nursery's reception area contains notices, leaflets and publications about Montessori and local events, and schools and families are welcome to talk to members of the management team at any time. The online system is used to generate excellent and informative developmental reports, including a progress check at two years and transition reports, which cover the learning and development areas of the EYFS.

### **Staffing:**

The management team has extremely rigorous recruitment and induction procedures in place. There is excellent supervision, appraisal and self-evaluation documentation; these performance management processes are regularly undertaken and effectively pinpoint areas for development and support within the whole team. This ensures that staff feel entrusted and very well supported in their roles. Detailed appraisals link directly to job descriptions, further enhancing the understanding of staff with regard to their roles and responsibilities, and any specific training required is targeted. These robust processes result in a staff and management team who work very well together, trust one another and pay high regard to each other's strengths and areas of expertise. Supportive motivational methods include a monthly award for excellent service, to which all staff may contribute their views. Regular formal class team and whole staff meetings ensure open discussion between staff and that any changes to policies or routines are minuted and actions carried out.

Three out of four of the management team hold Montessori early years' diplomas. In addition to the management team, there are 24 members of staff working directly with the children, five of whom are working towards a Montessori diploma. Most of the staff have childcare qualifications to level 3 or above and three have early years' degrees. The nursery demonstrates a strong commitment to continued professional development (CPD). Relevant training is offered across the team. Since the first re-accreditation visit, two more staff members have commenced Montessori diploma courses. The management team also offers thorough in-house training and regular quizzes to refresh the knowledge of the staff and ensure the team has a secure understanding of Montessori practices and principles. Recent staff appraisals focused on each team member's ambitions and professional development. This provided a very useful forum to review understanding and deepen their knowledge of the Montessori approach. The setting should continue this strong commitment to CPD.

Under the highly organised and strong leadership of the management team, staff work



as a professional, committed and enthusiastic team who genuinely take pride in the nursery. The management's continual drive to excel and improve the quality of learning opportunities demonstrates that the nursery is committed to Montessori practices and yet remains receptive to change.

Name of Assessor: Carolyn O J McNeill

Date report submitted: First visit – 5<sup>th</sup> October 2015

Second visit – 28<sup>th</sup> January 2016