

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 relevant 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 and considered 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.

Chives Montessori School

Akenham Studios, Henley Road, Ipswich, Suffolk, IP6 0HL

Date of previous MEAB accreditation: November 2011

Date of first re-accreditation visit: 15 November 2016

Date of second re-accreditation visit: 23 March 2017

This accreditation is valid until 31 July 2021

This accreditation report relates to the provision for children aged 4 months to 5 years

Description of the setting:

Chives Montessori School was established in 1989. The present owner, who also manages the setting, took over in 1996. It moved to its current site on a working farm in 2005 and has access to many areas of the farm. The single-storey building comprises three large rooms for the children – the Nursery for up to nine babies and toddlers from 4 months to 2 years, the Red Room for up to 15 children aged 2 to 3 years, and the Green Room for a maximum of 20 children from 3 to 5 years. There is also a large hallway, an office and cloakroom facilities. A kitchen, which adjoins the Red Room, is used to prepare breakfast, snack and tea and also to serve lunches brought in by an outside caterer.

Part of the outdoor area is laid to tarmac on which stands a storage shed, bike shed and a water-play structure, sand and water trays, a slide and three play houses. There is a large grassed area with trees, planters, and a climbing frame with an attached slide.

The setting is open all year from 08.00 to 18.00 (except for Bank Holidays and one week at Christmas), and children may attend for morning sessions 08.00 to 13.00 or for full days. Some children only attend during school term times. There are 71 children on roll and the maximum number of children currently attending any session is 40. On the day of the second re-accreditation visit there were four children under 2 years attending the Nursery in the morning and afternoon. Fourteen children attended the Red Room in the morning and 12 stayed the full day. In the Green Room 17 children attended all day.

In addition to the manager who works at the setting full-time, there are three full-time members of staff and five who work part-time. The manager and three other staff members hold Montessori teaching qualifications, one of whom is the deputy manager who works full-time and covers for the manager when she is away from the setting. The manager also has Early Years Professional Status (EYPS), as does another member of the team. Staff working with children under 2 years old are suitably qualified and experienced. On the morning of the second re-accreditation visit seven members of staff were in attendance and six remained for the afternoon. One of the full-time staff members has received special educational needs (SEND) training to support children with additional needs, including those with disabilities and those for whom English is an additional language (EAL). This Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCo) liaises with outside agencies as appropriate to ensure that the requirements of all the children at the setting are met.

Summary

Chives Montessori School is a well-established early years setting run by an owner/manager with a passion for Montessori education. In addition to offering a rich Montessori environment for children, the manager's priority is to provide training and guidance to the staff team who also share her vision. One of the main strengths of this setting is that adults are mindful of the need to model positive behaviour to the children and as a result the children display good manners and are very considerate towards each other. This fulfills one of the recommendations made during the previous MEAB accreditation. Other recommendations included providing more sensorial materials in the Red Room and continuing with peer observations; these recommendations have also been met. The manager and her team work hard to develop and maintain strong links with parents, they listen to their suggestions and incorporate these into the setting's development planning.

The setting has worked hard to implement the recommendations made at the first re-accreditation visit. Both children and staff have adapted well to changes to the work cycle and appear confident with their new routines. This is best demonstrated in the caring welcome children receive on arrival, the calm hand-over from parents to staff

and the ease with which the children enter their learning environment and independently choose activities from the shelves. The willingness of staff members to incorporate the recommendations into their practice demonstrates their dedication in working towards providing excellent care for the children. The commitment demonstrated by the manager and staff to enhancing both their understanding of Montessori philosophy and their ability to reflect on their own practice is both professional and admirable.

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 to develop the morning work cycle to include the outside environment so that all the children can access the outdoor learning opportunities spontaneously; and
- the manager should continue to ensure that all staff are fully supported and mentored, using the performance management structure implemented successfully after the first re-accreditation visit, in order that they fully understand the Montessori philosophy and principles and embed these in their practice.

Philosophy:

The setting's commitment to Montessori practice is explained in the 'Welcome Pack', which is given to parents and staff, in its policy documentation and also on its securely managed web-based recording system. In addition, written literature explaining the Montessori approach is available in the hallway where parents can easily access it. The setting's website includes references and links to its previous MEAB accreditation report, and sections on its aims and objectives and 'Why Choose a Montessori School'. The manager and team review their Montessori practice during monthly staff meetings to ensure that they share a common vision, and areas for development are noted in the School Action Plan document.

Children at Chives Montessori School are offered a wide range of activities and resources appropriate to their developmental stage, and they are trusted to access these independently, following their own inner needs. The adults recognise the importance of children being active learners so they ensure that the indoor and outdoor environments are conducive to this. Following the first re-accreditation visit, children right across the setting have become more independent in their learning. Staff members have successfully created opportunities for children to enjoy greater freedom (in making choices about their learning, where they want to work and when they would like to have snack) and they have adopted a longer work cycle. The success of this improvement is evident from the start of the day. During the second visit a child, on arrival, walked

directly to the shelf where their cress seeds were growing to “see if it’s bigger”. Another child chose to go outside straight away. In meeting the recommendations set at the first visit, the team has demonstrated its commitment to fully embedding Montessori philosophy and principles throughout the setting. By maintaining this progress, under the direction of the manager, staff will ensure that Chives Montessori School continues to offer very good Montessori practice.

Learning and Development:

Planning for and assessment of children’s learning is very good at Chives Montessori School. The team in each room plans group activities around particular topics every six weeks. These plans are displayed outside the children’s rooms so that parents can see them and have the opportunity to contribute their ideas. The topics are based on the adults’ observations of children’s interests and the children are asked what they would like to learn about once they are able to communicate their ideas. Weekly and daily planned activities focus primarily on exploratory, creative and outdoor play. On the morning of the first re-accreditation visit the children in the Green Room proudly talked about their current topics of elephants and of the human body, and showed items that they had made for displays about these topics. Throughout the day of the second visit children were observed creating artwork and cards for Mother’s Day and in the Green Room the ‘Creation Station’ was busy with children planting daffodils in pots. Some children were linking this activity with the daffodils and flowers which they had seen on their way to the setting and in their gardens. This led to a delightful conversation among three children about the signs of spring, which was skillfully guided by the staff member helping them.

In addition to these group plans, all staff members develop individual plans for their key children using information from observations documented on the online recording system. All staff can contribute to these observations but it is the key person who maintains these records weekly and uses them to draw together plans for the child’s possible next steps in their development. Outdoor learning is also included in this individual planning. The online records and planning, which in the Red and Green Rooms are organised by the Montessori areas of learning, are automatically linked to the learning and development goals of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). In the Nursery, planning is organised by the EYFS’s prime areas of learning. Staff members use the online system to generate reports that assess the child’s progress with the EYFS, as well as with the Montessori areas of learning. The manager audits all the planning, recording and assessments undertaken to help ensure that these are of a high quality and to assess children’s development across the setting.

Since the first visit the team has replaced the early morning circle time with a new routine of welcoming children individually on arrival and, upon entry to their room, the children are immediately free to choose their work independently. This change has lengthened the work cycle from one and a half hours to two and a half hours. It is a credit to the staff and children how well they have adapted to this new routine, demonstrated by the calm and respectful atmosphere and by the children settling independently to start their work cycle. Children are engaged and confident, enjoying the

freedom of choosing their own work. Additional activities such as ballet and tennis skills are available to the Red and Green Room children in the afternoons. If they do not wish to join in then they are free to work with resources in either of the classrooms. The members of staff working with children under 2 years old in the Nursery follow each child's individual routine of playing, feeding and sleeping.

Learning and development at Chives Montessori School is well provided for and the adults understand the need to give children the freedom to follow their own interests, indoors and out. Ensuring that the extended work cycle remains part of the daily routine and includes free flow to the outdoor environment will give children the time they need to access the rich variety of learning experiences available to them.

Prepared Environment: resources and materials

The layout of the indoor learning environment encourages children to make very good use of all areas of their room and they enjoy a wide range of activities. In the Green Room the resources are arranged according to the Montessori areas of learning on easily accessible shelving. The good range of Montessori materials is appropriate to the developmental stage of the children in the room. Some non-Montessori materials are also available, such as those that relate to the group topics. There are enough materials available for the children in this room to work individually or in groups. There is also a creative area, a snack corner and a cosy book corner which provides a space for children who may wish to rest.

In the Red Room most of the materials relate to exercises of everyday living and these are developmentally appropriate, attractive and easily accessible to these younger children. Some early Montessori sensorial activities are also available; however, some materials are incomplete and staff should continue to be mentored by the manager in order that the prepared environment fully promotes Montessori principles. The room is divided into areas of learning and there is a cosy book corner where children can rest. Children from the Green and Red Rooms eat meals together in the Red Room.

The layout of the Nursery room is designed well to give a homely atmosphere, with good quality soft furnishings and plenty of storage. Low baskets contain early construction materials and collections of differently textured objects, and low shelves enable the babies to choose activities such as wooden stacking rings and soft toys. Children sleep in cots within the room and meals are served at low tables.

The outside environment at Chives Montessori School is extremely well equipped – children have access to a wide range of wheeled toys, climbing activities, creative and messy play. Additional resources are stored in the three playhouses and these are changed to match the current topics. Children from the Nursery access the same outside area as children from the Red and Green Rooms. On the day of the second re-accreditation visit two members of staff took the Nursery children for a walk around the farm before lunch. Following the recommendation made at the first visit, children from the Red and Green Rooms have the freedom to choose to go outside during the work cycle. This is a very positive step towards extending the work cycle to include outdoor

learning. On the day of the second visit five children were observed enjoying the outdoor area, having put on red bands in their classroom to express their choice to move outside. The deployment of staff is well managed to allow for this free flow access to the outside area. In the afternoon all children in the setting were given a choice of choosing activities in the Green Room or going on a Nature Walk around the farm.

The resources and rooms are sufficiently maintained and managed. The adults pay attention to how children use the materials; each room completes an Enabling Environments evaluation sheet every six weeks to inform staff's decisions on changes to the room's resources or layout, on training required, and to prepare future planning. Since the first visit each room's team has made changes to increase children's independence by improving their access to activities; they have successfully adapted the setting to enable children to play an active role in making choices about their own learning. Children and staff have embraced these changes positively. The recommendation for the manager to ensure all staff members are fully supported and mentored will further strengthen their ongoing commitment to providing a child-centered, well-prepared environment and approach to learning.

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

Children at Chives Montessori School are well engaged and are becoming independent learners. They complete their cycles of activity consistently well and the adults allow them space and time to choose their own resources and to repeat activities. Staff members remind children in the Red and Green Rooms to put their work away as a means of supporting their independence further. Children feel secure because the adults gently remind them of the classroom rules and the importance of kindness and respect. On the day of the second re-accreditation visit, a staff member speaking to children in the Green Room showed excellent skills in encouraging their problem-solving and reasoning when a child mentioned that "a brick is stuck", she encouraged the small group of children to come up with different ways of getting it out. She guided them in their language for reasoning and predicting outcomes. One child suggested using a torch which she fetched, thus allowing the child to lead the exploration.

The whole setting's environment is conducive to children being active learners and to developing independence in their self-care. Coat hooks are named and at a suitable level, and there is space for children to store their shoes and slippers. Those children who are able to wash their hands and prepare themselves for going outside independently. Staff across the setting should ensure that children's self-care routines, including for personal hygiene, are fully supported as part of the setting's commitment to promoting children's independence. In the Red and Green Rooms brooms, dustpans and brushes are available to encourage them to independently care for their classrooms, and outside there are brushes, buckets and spades placed within children's reach to encourage their care of the outside environment. During the second visit some children were seen sweeping up soil at the 'Creation Station'.

In the Green Room name cards are used by the children to self-register on arrival.

During the day of the second visit children in this room were observed preparing their individual snack, cutting fruit and pouring water or milk, and then washing up what they had used. Following the first visit the snack routine in the Red Room has been improved. The team has successfully adapted the environment to allow children to prepare their own snack individually but with supervision where needed. Children find a plate and cup, a knife and piece of fruit. One child during the second visit was observed cutting a pear safely and another peeled and chopped a banana. Jugs for pouring are appropriate in size and an area for washing and drying has been added. This valuable opportunity for independence is now a cycle of activity and part of the work cycle.

Children in both these rooms use a red band to put on when they choose to continue their work cycle outside. They demonstrate high levels of independence and are free to make decisions about what they would like to do.

Staff members in the Nursery organise the snack for the children and help them put coats and shoes on in preparation for going outside, while trying to encourage the children to do some of these tasks for themselves. One child demonstrated initiative in this room by tucking a chair under a table and picking up raisins that had dropped on the floor. Since the first visit, the manager and staff have worked well together in creating a system of mentoring and peer observation to support Nursery staff in developing children's independence further. The Nursery room has been rearranged for the children to access new practical life activities independently and the children were happily engaged during the second visit, enjoying the freedom to repeat simple transferring activities with spoons and pasta. The language used by the staff members reflects a positive approach to enhancing children's learning. They use phrases such as, "Would you like to choose the pasta or the pebbles," to encourage children to make their own choices and they are encouraging and very caring in their manner.

Children arriving at 08.00 join together in the Red Room where breakfast is available. They can choose activities individually or as a group. At 09.00 children enter their room where they are greeted at the door by staff. Children in the Red Room are supported by staff and parents to self-register and they begin their work cycle at 09.00, as do the children in the Green Room. The children in the Nursery also start their morning together at 09:00. They are greeted warmly and settle quickly.

During the lunchtime meal children from the Red and Green Rooms are very capable in laying the table, serving themselves, taking turns passing dishes to each other, pouring their own water and scraping their dishes. After lunch the babies remain in the Nursery where they can go to sleep, and children in the Red Room can rest in their cosy area. Another work cycle is offered in the afternoon session. During this time there is a broader mixed age range due to more free flow of movement of the children to each other's rooms and to outdoors, both under the careful supervision of members of staff; the afternoon session therefore gives them even greater choice of activity. Most of the children have left by 16.00 and any remaining children can choose to go outside or to join together in the Red Room. The adults allow the children to set the pace and they respect the children's choices, and the recent improvements to practice and the daily routines are highly commendable as they more fully support children's independence.

Montessori Practice: links with parents, including reports and records

The setting places high value on working in partnership with parents. The strong relationship between Chives Montessori School and its families is evident in the praise parents have for the quality of care and learning offered to their children. Parents feel informed with regard to Montessori practice at home and at the setting through the availability of information packs such as 'Montessori at Home', and 'Encouraging Independence'. On the day of the first re-accreditation visit parents reported that 'A Guide to Parental Involvement' and the six-weekly newsletters were informative and useful in supporting the setting/home links. Parents also talked about the parenting course available to them, developed by the manager. The mandatory two year old progress check is discussed with parents during parents evenings, and one parent mentioned these evenings as being a wonderful opportunity to see what her child had been doing, as they are shown videos of the children engaged in relevant and meaningful cycles of activity. These evenings are held twice a year, and parents can also attend open mornings and Montessori information evenings; all these events give excellent opportunities for parents to discuss their child's learning journey with their key person and to learn more about Montessori at home and in the wider community.

Records of achievement are shared with the child's new school when they leave and staff members are supportive of parents and children during this transition. Parents report that the 'open door policy' enables them to speak to staff, including their child's key person, at any time. Key people meet the needs of individual children, which parents comment on and appreciate, and staff liaise daily to help ensure continuity of care within the setting and at home. Parents use the setting's secure online recording system to look at their child's daily records, current learning and activities. The manager uses this tool effectively in sharing children's achievements with parents. In the entrance of the setting parents can access and borrow information about Montessori education. On the day of the first visit, the notice board displayed daily notices (a message to parents that a hairdresser was visiting the next day) and an article about parenting tips. Daily correspondence between staff and parents is positive, supportive and accurate. The setting's links with parents are highly effective and parents feel that they are working in partnership with the staff team.

Staff: qualifications, deployment, and performance management

The team at Chives Montessori School creates a warm and welcoming learning environment. The children are happy and the adults know them extremely well. The manager engenders collaborative practice, with the emphasis on room leaders working alongside each practitioner, and all contributing to the children's learning and wellbeing. Staff members feel supported by good leadership; they exercise autonomy in their roles and are trusted by the manager to make decisions about promoting children's learning, such as in planning topics and activities with regard for the interests of the children. Knowledge of their progress enables staff to prepare the environment effectively to meet the needs of the children at each stage of their development. Each room's team meets weekly to discuss planning, next steps and activities. Monthly staff meetings are also

held and staff members take it in turns to document these meetings. The staff team is observant and attentive to ensure consistency in the care they offer. They work very well as a team and negotiate their deployment and the free movement of the children indoors and outside effectively. A designated member of staff supervises the outdoor activities in the morning and afternoon sessions; and is supported by other adults as required.

New members of staff complete an induction programme with the manager or her deputy. This includes a detailed review and evaluation of their induction after a six-month period. A written guide on Montessori principles and practice is provided to all staff and all have job descriptions. The manager carries out staff appraisals every six months and offers feedback on staff's performance. Peer observations also take place.

The manager is highly qualified in early years and has a degree. Following the first re-accreditation visit the deployment of staff has been reconsidered, with a trained Montessori practitioner now working in the Nursery and another member of staff taking the lead for co-ordinating the provision of the Montessori curriculum. In addressing the recommendations a system of mentorship and peer observation now supports staff working in the Nursery and it is recommended that this system continues to be used to ensure that all staff fully understand the Montessori philosophy and can implement its principles.

The manager's commitment to the continuing professional development of the whole team is reflected in the support given recently to two members of staff in undertaking an Integrating Montessori Practice course, adding to their level 3 childcare qualifications. This training has broadened the opportunities at the setting for Montessori practice to be shared across the team. Other recent training has included Montessori workshops and also has focused on the use of the online record-keeping system, in particular on planning for individual children and deciding next steps. Staff members feel more confident about meeting the needs of individual children as a result of this training. Photographs of staff and their names are displayed for parents and visitors and the whole team approach to supporting children's learning at Chives Montessori School is made clear. The staff team feels valued and this is reflected in team members' positive comments about the leadership and support for their professional development.

Name of Assessors: Susie Norman, Becca Hendry

Date report submitted: First visit – 21st November, 2016
Second visit – 24th March, 2017