



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.

Meadowbrook Montessori School

Malt Hill, Warfield, Berkshire RG42 6JQ

Date of previous MEAB accreditation: June 2013

Date of first re-accreditation visit: 22 January 2016

Date of second re-accreditation visit: 14 April 2016

This accreditation report relates to the provision for children aged 16 months to 5 years

Description of the school:

Meadowbrook Montessori School is a pre-primary and primary school registered for children aged from 2½ years to 11 years. It also runs two hour parent and toddler sessions up to three times a week for children aged between 16 months to 2½ years. Meadowbrook was founded in 1990 and is privately owned. Only the pre-primary (for children aged 2½ to 5 years) and the parent and toddler group are being considered in this re-accreditation.

The Nursery and Reception classes (which are also referred to in the report as pre-primary) are housed in a Victorian school building, which is set within its own substantial grounds in a rural location, close to the village of Warfield. A separate annex in these grounds is used on Monday and Friday mornings for the parent and toddler sessions and for additional pre-primary activities. Meadowbrook Primary School is at a separate location nearby. The pre-primary building consists of three classrooms, one main and a smaller adjoining classroom which are used by all the pre-primary children in the morning and by the Reception children in the afternoon, and a separate classroom that



is used by the Nursery class for afternoon activities. The building also has a library area, hallway, an office, staffroom, and lavatory facilities. The outdoor provision consists of an extensive playing field with a wildlife garden and gym area to the rear of the premises, as well as a smaller area at the front that is accessed from the main classroom.

There are currently 28 children aged between rising 3 and 5 years on the roll, and 14 toddlers attend the weekly sessions with a parent. On the day of the second re-accreditation visit 20 children attended the pre-primary in the morning and 13 stayed for the afternoon. The parent and toddler group was assessed on the day of the first visit, during which 6 children attended, each accompanied by a parent. The Nursery children all attend a minimum of three morning sessions and the Reception children attend five days a week. Meadowbrook Montessori is open from 08.15 to 17.00, Monday to Friday during term times. A summer holiday club is also available but is not included in this accreditation. The children who stay on for the afternoon bring their own lunch and all the children bring in fruit for snack. Those who stay until 17.00 help make their own tea at the setting.

The setting (incorporating the parent and toddler group) employs six members of staff including the head and a lunch assistant. The head is responsible for the day to day running of the setting and works full time, with her deputy being in charge in her absence. Another member of staff also works full time. On the day of the second re-accreditation visit five members of staff were present in the morning, one came in just for the lunch period, and three members of staff were present in the afternoon. All five of the teaching staff working with the children have a Montessori diploma.

The setting makes provision for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities, as well as for children with English as an additional language and it liaises with external agencies such as the local authority and private therapists.

Summary

The children are happy, settled and play together co-operatively in the nurturing and caring environment at Meadowbrook Montessori. Each child is valued, respected and treated as an individual. The staff are excellent role models and establish clear boundaries and expectations of acceptable behaviour. The children learn in an environment which is well prepared according to the Montessori philosophy, and materials are laid out in clearly defined areas of learning on easily accessible shelving.

Children's individual needs and emotional wellbeing are catered for effectively, and they are ready and eager to learn. In combining the requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) and the Montessori principles, the setting offers a curriculum suitable for the children's ages and stages of learning. A major strength is the parent and toddler programme which is a wonderful opportunity for transition into the pre-primary.



Staff have worked with the recommendations from the previous MEAB accreditation by improving their evaluation of learning and considering the structure of the afternoon sessions for the older children. Following the first re-accreditation visit the time allocated for independent learning has been extended to two and a half hours daily and, as a result, the children are noticeably calmer and transition to adult-led activity is smoother. The lunch routine has also been reorganised and is now a more sociable experience. Following another recommendation from the first visit, photographs of the staff are now displayed prominently in the hallway which enhances the quality of information available for parents and visitors, and the notice board is now used to inform parents about weekly activities. The addition of the nature table indoors has given the children more opportunities to experience natural objects first-hand during the entire day.

The whole team are highly reflective in their practice and are fully committed to driving improvement forward.

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 extending the good practice in place for snack to the lunch routine by offering the children washing up facilities; and
- to continue to offer the longer work cycle which has been established since the first visit.

Philosophy:

The Montessori philosophy is the foundation for the children's learning in Meadowbrook Montessori's pre-primary and parent and toddler groups. The aim of the staff is to give each child a firm base in education and to support them in meeting their full potential. The staff have high standards and expectations of themselves and of the children, setting realistic goals, while being sensitive to the children's needs and encouraging their independence. The calm and industrious atmosphere and the respect for the environment and for each other that the children develop ensure that they have a positive first experience of school.

The comprehensive website is updated regularly and new parents are given useful information when their children start. Informative newsletters, a handbook, the setting's policies and its mission statement are all made available to the parents. They are kept up to date with their children's progress through the child's Learning Journal, regular emails and parents meetings. The parent and toddler group offers an excellent



opportunity for them to become better informed about the Montessori method as they stay with their children and can see for themselves how they learn.

The adults work extremely well as a team and the weekly staff meetings are used to ensure that they are all informed of any changes and have an opportunity to share good practice.

Learning and Development:

Meadowbrook Montessori's pre-primary provides an excellent range of child-focused, predominately Montessori materials and other relevant activities in the classrooms and outside. These provide the children with a suitable learning programme to meet their needs. The practical life activities are changed half-termly and materials for the topic work are updated when the need arises. The head and her staff meet regularly to discuss planning, which covers the seven areas, but planning is differentiated according to the individual needs of the children and the age range attending.

On the day of the first re-accreditation visit the Reception children were learning about space and one child had brought a home-made space shuttle into school. On the second visit their topics were Brazil and pets, for which the role-play area had been set up as a veterinary surgery. The pre-primary topic was healthy eating. Long and medium term planning is comprehensive and is done collectively by the team. The short term planning is compiled by each key person and is based on their children's individual needs. One of the strengths of this setting is the shared responsibility for planning, observations and record keeping. All the staff make observations of the children but it is the responsibility of the child's key person to keep the Learning Journey records up to date and relevant. Staff also complete baseline assessments and Foundation Stage Profiles for children in the Reception group. As the comprehensive and repetitive record keeping system has evolved over many years the staff are planning to review it before the next academic year.

The children are able to experiment and learn independently and imaginatively with the resources. On the day of the first visit two children were using a variety of the sensorial and maths materials to build an intricate maze. They were given time to experiment with this equipment and were left to co-operate independently, working until they were satisfied with the result. They were later joined by more children and this spontaneous group worked well together, extending their own learning by creating a different structure with the materials. Staff only intervened when necessary, which allowed the children to make the major decisions for themselves.

The children who attend the parent and toddler group are very well prepared for their introduction to the pre-primary as they are free to choose their activities and work at their own pace, guided by Montessori qualified staff and supported by their parents.

During the afternoon the children are divided into the Nursery and Reception age



ranges and have group activities that vary across the week and which are often topic related. French, gym and sport for the Reception children take place at Meadowbrook Montessori Primary School during the afternoons.

Prepared Environment: resources and materials

The Victorian building is light and airy and the classrooms are very spacious. All the pre-primary children currently use the main classroom and its adjoining room. The third classroom is used for other activities such as French and afternoon groups. All the rooms are set up with reference to the Montessori method by having designated curriculum areas that are clearly defined. The low shelving and position of tables and chairs ensure that the children can access all the materials independently and that they have the space and choice of where to work. The materials on the shelves are clean and complete. Two child-sized sinks are available for the children to use independently when they need to wash up or clean their hands or equipment.

A third of the children currently attending are of Reception age and the more advanced Montessori materials available on the shelves are suitable for their age and stage of development. In the main room there is a separate area for snack and messy play as well as an area for the computer and a toy farm. The popular role-play area was set up as a home corner at the time of the first re-accreditation visit and on the day of the second visit the veterinary surgery was popular, with children attending to their 'sick animals' using relevant props.

Following the first visit an interesting nature table has been added, which invites interaction. The children were planting sunflower seeds – they were intrigued by the stripy seeds and told the staff that the flowers would be "enormous". A system of showing which plant has already been watered has been devised to ensure that they are not overwatered. With the introduction of this table the children are now able to link their outdoor learning experiences to those indoors. Flowers decorate the classroom. The library area is open all morning and is used for one to one activities and reading in small groups.

The parent and toddler area in the separate annex is also bright and airy and is set up with materials suitable for the young children. The equipment is displayed on low shelving and is very easy for them to access. They bring their own snack and are able to have it when they are ready. Low tables, suitable chairs and a large mat space make this a very appropriate environment for the age and stage of these children. A treasure basket and more materials to promote heuristic play have been added following a recommendation from the first visit. The toddlers use the main field for their outside area, which is not used by the older children while they are there.

The outside grassed area with tarmacked paths is used during the pre-primary work cycle and can be directly accessed from the main classroom. During the winter, when the children need to change their clothing, they use the main entrance door. This



system works well and the children understand the routine. The area is well equipped with different activities. On the day of both re-accreditation visits there was water play, bikes and plenty of other suitable outdoor activities for the children to use independently. There are also logs and crates for building as well as a run for balls and two planting troughs, one containing herbs and one bulbs. The children made a 'bonfire' with the logs and were pretending to roast marshmallows.

The large playing field used by all the children at the end of the morning and after lunch offers outstanding provision. It is well equipped and maintained, with large wooden climbing equipment and obstacle courses. There is also a separate area used as a wildlife garden. Ride-on toys are also used on the marked out tarmac 'road' between the pre-primary and the annex. The children have an abundance of suitable materials to use both inside and out.

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

There are many opportunities for the children to develop their skills and independence at Meadowbrook Montessori. The children show a high level of respect for each other, the staff and the prepared environment. One of the outstanding features of this setting is the way staff allow the children to resolve their own problems by giving them opportunities to make their own decisions. They also manage their own clothes and footwear successfully, with little adult supervision. As all the pre-primary children are based in the same areas during the morning, staff deployment is excellent and communication between the adults is regular and effective.

The benefit that the children gain from the vertical age grouping is apparent in the way the older children are able to support the younger ones in their learning whilst at the same time having this opportunity to consolidate their own understanding. Children work together well, making friends and learning to take turns and assist each other. This was especially evident on the day of the first re-accreditation visit at the end of the morning when the children were putting their work away.

The setting operates a rolling snack time, which is available for the majority of the morning work cycle in the pre-primary. The pre-primary children cut their fruit and wash up their plates. It is recommended that this excellent practice is extended to lunch by giving them the opportunity to complete the cycle of activity by washing up their plates after eating lunch.

The staff have a very open relationship with the parents and care is taken to educate them on the importance of encouraging children's growing independence. The parents endeavour to continue this good practice at home. Each term Meadowbrook Montessori Primary School's head runs a workshop on 'promoting positive discipline', which is available to both staff and parents. This ensures that there is continuity in the management of the children's behaviour.



By offering freedom of choice during the two and a half hour work cycle and by allowing the children to move easily between the classrooms, the library area and the outside, staff enable the children to enjoy their learning and to develop the ability to explore their surroundings fully. The level of independence offered to the children encourages them to be self-confident and self-aware and to develop into successful learners.

Montessori practice: Classroom management

Children arrive at any time between 08.15 and 09.15, with the majority of the children arriving at around 09.00 on the days of both re-accreditation visits. They enter the classroom and self-register, and are able to access the materials as soon as they are ready. Children's free-flow to the outdoors is well managed as staff are deployed where necessary when the children choose to access the garden adjacent to the classroom during the morning work cycle. Following the first re-accreditation visit the staff have fully embraced the importance of the longer work cycle and the benefits that this offers the children. It has been extended to two and half hours and it is recommended that this length of period in which the children can work independently is maintained. The children are noticeably calmer and more engaged in their chosen activities, and transition to the subsequent group activity is smoother as children join in when they have finished what they are doing and are ready. Adult-led groups, such as the French session for the Nursery children, are of an appropriate nature and length; the children obviously enjoy them and they all have an opportunity to join in.

The lunch routine has been reorganised to offer a more natural sequence, the children generally start eating at the same time and are now encouraged to interact freely. There is a rota for staff to eat with the children, to enhance this social experience.

After lunch all the pre-primary children have access to the field for free play. Should children need to sleep they are provided with mats and taken to a quiet book corner. On the days of both visits no children slept. Designated parents and members of staff have permission to drive the children between the school sites. French for the Nursery children is offered one morning a week after the work cycle, and they have gym in the annex. Both age groups are also offered music sessions in the annex. The two age groups sometimes join for activities in the afternoon such as on the day of the first visit, when they came together to make use of their wonderful wildlife area. Children who stay until 17.00 help prepare their tea with a member of staff; on the day of the second visit they enthusiastically made and ate cheese twists.

During the toddler sessions the parents or carers support their children for the duration. The sessions are led by one of the Montessori qualified staff and start with a group activity, the children then have free access to their learning environment before playing outside and going home.



Montessori Practice: links with parents, including reports and records

The staff at the setting understand the importance of good communication with parents and recognise their role as their child's first educators. Formal and compulsory parent meetings are held twice a year and these, together with the informal day to day communication, help ensure that the staff and parents work in partnership. The informative website, comprehensive annual reports, the key person arrangements and the recently introduced weekly newsletters all contribute to the effective collaboration staff have with parents. Parents are also able to attend courses run by Meadowbrook Montessori Primary School as well as being invited in to contribute to topic discussions and share their own expertise with the pre-primary children.

The staff keep comprehensive records on the children's progress and use a wide range of methods to ensure that the children's needs are met. Their individual Learning Journals are updated termly with observations and various tick charts, as well as informative photographs. These are available to the parents all year round and are kept in the hallway. A child's key person completes the mandatory two year old progress check when appropriate and the annual report which details the child's progress under the Montessori areas of learning. A comprehensive transition document provided by the local borough is completed when a child leaves for another school. When a child moves to the Meadowbrook Primary, staff use an equally informative in-house document along with the Learning Journal as an effective transition package. Children who are going to attend the Primary have many opportunities to visit it, such as for their weekly French and sport lessons. Their social and emotional preparation for their transition is therefore excellent.

Staffing:

The head demonstrates a profound commitment to the setting. She is responsible for its day-to-day running under guidance from the Director of Education who is based at Meadowbrook Primary School, and has the full support of the staff who work with her. The high expectations which they have for themselves and for the children ensure that very good standards of provision and care are offered. All the teaching staff have a full Montessori diploma. Some staff roles such as SENCo are delegated and all staff are given varied responsibilities. Following the first re-accreditation visit photographs of the staff are now displayed with their names and details of their responsibilities, to give the parents and visitors a clear idea of who to approach.

Continued professional development is embedded in practice and staff are encouraged to regularly update their skills and knowledge. For example, the head has recently undertaken baseline assessment training with Early Excellence (EExBA-R), and another member of staff has enhanced the way she teaches music and movement as a result of a local authority music workshop.

The induction procedure is effective and the member of staff who joined most recently



has felt very well supported. Individual job descriptions are updated annually and appraisals, held termly, are an important part of the setting's self-evaluative practice. Peer observations are currently the responsibility of the head and the written evidence is then used for the staff appraisals.

The small size of the team makes communication direct and informal. Minutes are recorded at the weekly staff meetings and are kept on the premises. Clear understanding of roles and responsibilities, and the head's receptive attitude to her staff and their suggestions, all make for a happy team. The setting's commitment to supporting the children's development and to providing them with a high quality Montessori education is evidenced in their desire to seek MEAB re-accreditation.

Name of Assessor: Charlotte White

Date report submitted: First visit – 24 January 2016

Second visit – 15 April 2016