



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) and subsequent 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.

Colourbox Montessori School Ltd

Newmarket College, Exning Road, Newmarket, Suffolk CB8 0EB

Date of first re-accreditation visit: 26 June 2014

Date of second re-accreditation visit: 21 October 2014

Date of previous MEAB accreditation: May 2011

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

Description of the school

Colourbox Montessori School Ltd in Newmarket is registered as a limited company and is located on two separate sites. It opened in 1993.

The Lady Wolverton site for children aged 3 to 40 months comprises two large classrooms, The Nest and the Garden House, and an office, sensory room, kitchen, small staff room and toilet facilities for adults and children. Children in The Nest are aged from 3 to 24 months and in the Garden House, are 20 to 40 months old. The site is set in approximately two acres of woodland with a children’s garden and enclosed, secure play area.

The Newmarket College site is just a short walk away and caters for the 2½ to 5 years age group. There are two mobile classrooms, World Room and Ocean Room, the larger of which also includes an office and sensory room. Both rooms contain toilet facilities for adults and children and kitchenettes.

The school is open 52 weeks a year except for bank holidays, from 07.30 to 18.00 hours, Monday to Friday, and children attend a variety of days and sessions over the course of the week. There are 165 children on the roll; 53 birth to 2; 57 2 to 3 year olds and 55 3 to 5 year olds, with a maximum of 83 children attending daily. On the occasion of the second re-accreditation visit there were 27 children in both the morning afternoon sessions in the Nest and Garden House with 12 staff, and 29 children in the morning and 20 in the afternoon in the



World and Ocean Rooms with 8 staff in the morning and 7 in the afternoon.

Breakfast, a hot lunch and tea are provided as well as healthy snacks during the day and water is freely available for the children to drink. There is provision for children with Special Educational Needs (SEN) and for those with English as an Additional Language (EAL).

The owner holds the International Montessori Diploma as does the Operations Manager and Business Manager and there are 25 other members of staff, all with appropriate childcare qualifications. The setting also employs a cook and there are four relief staff members.

Summary

Colourbox Montessori Ltd offers a very high standard of Montessori provision. Its strength is the excellent partnership with parents, providing them with the means to make a positive contribution to their children's learning and development.

The staff are extremely well qualified and encouraged to continue their studies to achieve their full potential as educators, for the benefit of the children as well as themselves. Continued Professional Development is a high priority of the school with all the staff.

They have created a beautiful learning environment, both inside and outdoors, which the children appreciate by helping to maintain it. Staff in The Nest and Garden House provide the children with appropriate activities that promote their independence and encourage them to explore the world around them. The resources in the World and Ocean Rooms promote further learning. Staff have developed a pictorial curriculum which consists of photographs of every piece of Montessori material in the relevant curriculum area, making it easy for children to independently select a piece of work. Good records are kept so that children's progress can be easily tracked; however children's future lines of development could be written more clearly for children in The Nest and Garden House. All members of staff in each room contribute to the children's learning and development.

Each classroom is appropriately resourced for the age and stage of development of the children, but it is recommended that some extra sensorial and early numeracy resources be added to the Garden House. All the resources and materials are in good order.

Staff plan activities both inside and outdoors, and children are free to participate or just to work spontaneously during both the morning and afternoon work cycles. They often go on outings in the local area. Children are confident with adults, feel safe and secure and exhibit a high level of independence.

Parents are considered an integral part of the school community and the school's new Parent Link initiative offers plenty of opportunity for parents to learn more about the Montessori approach as well as participate in social events.

The benefits of a well-qualified team of professionals, working hand in hand with local families puts Colourbox Montessori Ltd at the heart of the community in Newmarket.



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:

- Ensure that possible lines of development are placed at the front of the Learning Journeys in The Nest and Garden House.
- Add extra sensorial and numeracy activities to the Garden House.

Philosophy:

The setting's educational principles and goals are clearly documented on the school's website and in the parents' handbook, with the mission to 'implement the philosophy, practices and curriculum of Dr Maria Montessori and her method of education in line with the Early Years Foundation Stage'. It was evident from observing the children and their interactions with the adults that these principles and practices are being adhered to at Colourbox Montessori.

The very well qualified staff team understands the principles behind following a child's interests and this starts from the youngest child in The Nest through to the children in the World and Ocean Rooms. All the children form close bonds with the adults in the setting and feel safe and confident in the well prepared environment.

Parents are kept well informed about their children's progress and appreciate the setting's regular feedback. The school's website, together with Parent Link, gives parents the opportunity to find out more about the Montessori method and contribute to their child's learning at home. Aims and philosophy are reviewed regularly to ensure consistency of practice throughout the school.

Overall, the quality of the Montessori provision is of a high standard due to the teamwork of knowledgeable and caring staff.

Learning and Development:

Children at Colourbox have the opportunity for spontaneous learning throughout the day and have access to resources and activities that promote their learning and development. This includes a pictorial Montessori curriculum that displays photographs of each activity and allows children to develop at their own pace while supporting the individual in his/her learning.

Long term plans are made by the Room Leaders and Operations Manager and reflect various cultural and community events that occur throughout the year; these are circulated to parents and their views as well as the children's are taken into account when planning events in more detail.

Each room plans a separate monthly theme, although the staff in the World and Ocean Rooms



often share their planning and resources. Themes are often linked around the children's interests and there is a Children's Committee that encourages the children to make a real contribution to their learning and development. Planned activities for the week are displayed in the classrooms, showing links to the EYFS, and they are thoroughly evaluated by the room leaders.

Children in The Nest and Garden House have plenty of opportunity to pursue child-initiated activities and these, together with planned activities are linked to the Prime Areas of the EYFS. The adults carry out regular observations during the course of the day and respect the very youngest child's need to follow their own timetable while promoting their learning and development. When the time comes, mandatory two year old checks are carried out by the setting.

All children's achievements are recorded in the Learning Journeys (LJ's) that contain observations that are made on an almost daily basis as well as photographs and parental comments. In order for the children's learning to be as child-led as possible, the pictorial curriculum is at the front of every LJ; for the toddlers, this is focusing on Grace and Courtesy as well as early Activities for Everyday Living (AEL) and Sensorial materials.

As the children progress through the Garden House, and on to the World and Ocean Rooms, other pages are added to include all areas of the Montessori curriculum. All the activities are linked to the EYFS. Using a pictorial curriculum at the front of their Learning Journeys as a point of reference, means children can easily see, which piece of equipment or activity they can tackle next, or return to and repeat an activity they have previously enjoyed. Regular evaluation ensures that staff are able to plan for children's further lines of development. Most of the staff, particularly in the World and Ocean Rooms, list possible further activities on the front of children's LJ's, but this is not done in The Nest or Garden House. As these very young children are sometimes introduced to non-Montessori activities and cannot always make independent decisions about which activities to choose next, it is recommended that staff include children's 'next steps' at the front of the LJ's.

Children make full use of both the indoor and outdoor provision during the 2½ hour work cycle in both the morning and afternoon sessions, and the majority of learning observed during both visits was child-initiated.

Prepared Environment: resources and materials

Resources and materials in all four rooms are all appropriate for each age group and stage of development.

The Nest and Garden House share the same site. Both rooms share a small vestibule at the front of the building; the front door has a safety code so that only staff and carers can gain access. The classrooms are at either end of the building, and in between is a small office, adult toilet and kitchen where the food for the whole nursery is prepared by a qualified cook.

The Nest caters for the 3 to 24 months old age group. It has plenty of natural light with doors at the back of the room leading to the secure back garden. The indoor environment is furnished with tables and chairs, a set of wooden steps to encourage children's physical development, some very basic AEL activities, treasure baskets of bricks and other heuristic resources that the children can access, as well as books and a role play area. There is a large open sided hexagonal wooden box known as a 'shadow box' that children can crawl into and explore.



There are coat hooks and space for a change of shoes, a separate nappy changing area, enclosed kitchenette used for preparing snack and a sleeping area. Outside, the doors open onto a small secure garden, which in turn leads into a meadow. There is also sand and water play available.

The children in the Garden House are aged from 20 to 40 months. By the entrance to the classroom, there are coat hooks for children's coats and bags; the classroom also contains steps to promote physical development as well as low shelves containing basic AEL activities, some Sensorial materials, sandpaper numerals and a variety of puzzles that are rotated on a regular basis. Following a recommendation from the first visit, the Pink Tower and Broad Stair have been replaced; the old sets will be used for outdoor play. There are a significant number of children who have or are about to turn three who would benefit from more challenging sensorial and early numeracy activities. There is a small cultural shelf that is theme related, a designated art and craft area, snack area, role play area as well as a quiet book corner and children's toilets. A corner of the room is left for floor work and, after lunch, is used as a sleeping area. Outside, there is a small patio and on warmer days, children are able to work outdoors. There is an enclosed garden with a slide on a soft bark surface and an enclosed allotment where children grow flowers and vegetables. All resources in both rooms are clean and kept in good order.

Both the World Room and slightly smaller Ocean Room adjoin each other on a site just a short walk away from The Nest and Garden House; they cater for the 2½ to 5 year olds. Both rooms have coat hooks and room for the children to place their outdoor shoes. The Ocean Room has some shelves fixed to the wall at the back of the room that contain the AEL activities; other resources are arranged on low shelving in the relevant Montessori curriculum areas. All resources are well maintained with sufficient activities for all the children. There is a role play area, snack area, book corner, art and craft area and children's toilets. This mobile classroom is due to be replaced with a larger one at the beginning of November, and will enable the class to have up to 22 children. The World Room also contains Montessori work shelves that can be easily accessed by the children. As you enter the building, there are coat hooks and boxes for the change of shoes and a table, chairs and resources for art and craft activities. There is also an adult toilet. In the classroom, as well as the Montessori activities, tables and chairs, there is a role play area, separate snack area and children's toilets. There is also a well-equipped sensory room for children with SEN and innovative resources for children with EAL.

Outside, behind the nursery building, the children have access (with adult supervision) to a meadow and the woodland area. There is also a secure, enclosed front garden which is laid with an artificial grass surface. There are balance beams, a slide, mud garden, sand and water play and a woodworking area as well as a variety of scooters and trikes to aid gross motor skills. There is a wooden Wendy house and small garden for growing vegetables and flowers as well as various pots of vegetables placed around the garden. Books are also available for the children to read on a small bench. Children at both sites use the outside space whatever the weather. There are opportunities, throughout the week, for children in both sites to play together. The setting has recently introduced Forest School activities into the curriculum and the children have made dens and created mud paintings.

This is a well-resourced setting with plenty of opportunity for the children to explore, play and learn in both the indoor and outside environments.



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

Children in all four rooms are encouraged to be as independent as possible. They are given time to change shoes (the younger ones with support from the adults), choose their own activity which they can repeat as often as they wish, and work by themselves or with their friends. Children help themselves to snack, pour their own drinks, wash up after themselves and older children are able to see to their personal needs.

Through conversations with staff and the Parent Link/Facebook page, parents are encouraged to continue fostering their child's growing independence at home, with one parent commenting how her child has become very good at organizing her toys.

Children have the freedom to work at tables, on floor mats, by themselves or in groups, inside or outdoors. If children need to be re-directed to a new activity, this is done sensitively. Staff role model courteous behavior and the children are able to complete a cycle of activity and return work to the shelves, demonstrating a respect for the environment. Children's views are taken seriously by the adults through the children's committees, which promote mutual respect between adults and children.

The children are also responsible for looking after the class fish in each room, caring for the gardens at both sites, and keeping the indoor environment tidy.

Montessori practice: classroom management

The children who arrive at 07.30 are given breakfast and this is offered until approximately 09.00, by which time most of the children have arrived. When children arrive, they hang their coats and bags on pegs that have their picture next to them and change from their shoes into slippers. The shoe boxes also have photos of the children on them. There may be more than one photo by the peg or on the box, reflecting the children who come at different times or days. Younger children are gently assisted in putting on coats and changing shoes while they are developing their skills of independence. The children in all the classrooms continue to choose their own activities or take part in adult led planned activities until 11.15. During this time, from 10.00 onwards, children can help themselves to a healthy snack of fruit or crackers and a drink. They wash up their own plates and cups and even the younger children in The Nest are encouraged to pour their own drinks and help themselves to snack. There is a staff rota in The Nest for nappy changing.

At 11.15, all the children begin to prepare for lunch with a short circle time. In The Nest this mostly consists of songs and rhymes, however, sleeping children are left to wake up naturally and have lunch when they wake up. In the World and Ocean Rooms, tidy up music is played which tells the children it is time to prepare for lunch. Once they have tidied away, they also have a short circle time while some of the children and staff clean the tables and lay out place mats. These have the children's photos on them and are colour-coded according to whether or not a child has a particular allergy or dietary preference. A list of children with their dietary requirements is kept in each room and in the kitchen.

Children are invited to go and wash their hands, a few at a time, while the others continue with circle time. Once children have washed their hands, they serve themselves with a freshly cooked hot lunch and sit at the table with their friends. All the children use china plates and



apart from the youngest children in The Nest, use small sized metal cutlery. The children can help themselves to second helpings if they wish. Staff eat with the children and this gives everyone plenty of opportunities for social interaction as well as developing their finer motor skills. Once finished, the children tidy away their plates, brush their teeth and are free to go outside while staff clean the tables and prepare the classroom for the afternoon session, which begins at 13.00.

Children in The Nest (3 to 24 months) and the Garden House (20 to 40 months) have cots and mattresses for those requiring a nap after lunch. If any children in the World and Ocean Rooms require a sleep, the setting has mattresses and quilts available and space is made in the classroom as required.

Afternoon children arrive at 13.00 and the children are invited to either go back into the classroom or carry on working in the garden. The afternoon work cycle mirrors the morning session. During both morning and afternoon sessions, children often go on outings to, for example, to the library or the local Newmarket Horse Museum. The afternoon session finishes at 16.00 and those children staying until 18.00 enjoy an afternoon tea at 'Tea Club' of sandwiches, cake and fruit.

There is an excellent key person system in place with the adults supporting children during the course of the day, managing activities both indoors and outdoors. There are policies and procedures in place that support classroom management and staff ensure that the day runs smoothly.

Montessori Practice: links with parents, including reports and records

The staff ensures that daily checks are made, both indoors and outside, and there is a rota detailing responsibility for monitoring the snack tables, nappy changing and supervising the outdoors. Each child has a Key Person who is responsible for keeping the LJ's up to date, but as children can work with any member of staff they all contribute observations to the children records. Each Key Person has a 'Buddy' who takes over responsibilities in cases of absence due to illness or leave. Staff observations are used by the Key Person to inform the next steps to the child's learning.

Parents contribute to their child's records by giving constant feedback on the Parents Pages of the children's LJ's. They, in turn, receive feedback by talking to staff at daily handovers, when dropping off and collecting, by regular e-newsletters, notices on noticeboards and at regular parents' evenings. The setting also holds parent workshops for mathematics and literacy; a recent workshop was called 'Raising your Successful Child'. The school's recent initiative of Parent Link provides parents with the opportunity of getting together at social events and has over 150 followers on their Facebook page, which has a closed membership. Fathers are particularly encouraged to come in and read to the children. Although almost all parents spoken to had no previous knowledge of the Montessori method, all felt they had made the right choice in sending their children to Colourbox, and in some cases older siblings had previously attended. Parents had nothing but praise for the staff and felt they were very approachable.

The school has good links with the local schools and provides them with a copy of the Learning Journey when children leave, detailing progress in all areas of the EYFS framework.



Staffing:

There is a clear staffing structure in the school. The owner, Business Manager and Operations Manager all hold the Montessori International Diploma. Since the first re-accreditation visit, the Operations Manager has achieved EYT status. The owner visits the school approximately once a week but is in daily contact either by phone or email. The Business Manager is responsible for the administration of the setting and the Operations Manager has responsibility for the day to day running of the school as well as being a Room Leader. Her role is also to support and mentor staff in the setting, ensuring that the high standards of care and education are maintained. There is now a named Deputy Operations Manager who is temporarily taking over responsibility as the room leader in the Garden House, while the present room leader is on maternity leave. The Deputy Operations Manager is also the Forest School Co-ordinator and has undertaken the relevant training to achieve a qualification in outdoor learning.

Three other members of staff hold the Montessori International Diploma and 15 have a Level 3 childcare qualification. The four relief staff also have appropriate childcare qualifications. Several of the staff hold degrees and all are working towards improving their qualifications by studying at level 3, 4 or degree level.

There is a thorough induction procedure in place, with all staff being given a copy of the school's policies and procedures. Peer observations take place regularly and these feed into the annual staff appraisals. Staff have been and continue to be encouraged to attend both local authority training and workshops run by Montessori Centre International.

Room leaders meet formally once a week and staff in each room meet monthly to plan activities. These meetings are minuted appropriately. The owner and the Business and Operations Managers also meet from time to time, to discuss long term plans. There are relevant job descriptions that are reviewed regularly.

Staff in all four rooms work together for the benefit of the children. They are committed to providing excellent care and education for the children at Colourbox and enthusiastically embrace Montessori philosophy.

Name of Assessor: Margot Best

Date of reports: First visit – 26 June 2014

Second visit – 21 October 2014