

## **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.

### **Brookes Cambridge School Early Years Provision**

Flempton Road, Risby, Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk IP28 6QJ

Date of previous MEAB accreditation: June 2014

Date of first reaccreditation visit: 14 November 2017

Date of second reaccreditation visit: 30 April 2018

This accreditation is valid until June 2022

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

#### **Description of the Early Years Provision:**

The school was originally established as Cherry Trees Preparatory and Montessori School in 1982 and, following changes in ownership, it was purchased by Brookes Education Group in 2015, opening as Brookes Cambridge School in January 2016. Brookes Education Group owns and operates international independent schools across the world. The school currently offers education for children from nursery age up to Year 9; however, this report focuses solely on the provision known as ‘Early Years’, which is for children from 3 to 5 years of age. The school is located on a spacious rural site close to the village of Risby. The site contains an original school house and other buildings,

including one which is newly completed called Gryphon House. Lunch is served from a kitchen situated off the main school hall. Hot lunches are provided for all the children and are freshly cooked on site.

Early Years is situated in its own purpose-built building. It has two large adjoining classrooms: the Nursery for children from 3 to 4 years and Reception for those from 4 to 5 years. From each of these rooms children have access to their own small outdoor area and at certain times each day they have access to the school's spacious playing field, climbing apparatus and tarmac playground. They also have weekly use of its fenced garden and polytunnel, for the propagation of plants including vegetables, and access to its Forest School area. Each class has its own cloakroom facilities and purpose-built children's toilets are situated by the Nursery room. Early Years has provision to teach children with English as an additional language as well as those with other additional needs.

Brookes Cambridge School is open during term time from 08.00 until 18.00; however, most children in Early Years attend until 16.00. After-school care until 18.00 is provided either in the Nursery or in a separate building. This report only covers the core hours of 08.00 to 16.00. There is a mixed pattern of children's attendance across the week in the Nursery, and all children in Reception attend each weekday. There are 69 children enrolled at Brookes Cambridge School in total and 17 of these are in Early Years. On the day of the second reaccreditation visit there were five children in the Nursery and four in Reception, with four members of the Early Years staff.

At present there are six members of staff in this part of the school. Most staff work full-time during the core hours. Nursery and Reception are led by the Head of Early Years, whose post was created in January 2016. She has Qualified Teacher Status and reports to the Head Teacher of the school. One member of staff has a level 4 Montessori qualification and five have level 2 Montessori Foundation Certificates along with other early years' qualifications.

## Summary

Brookes Cambridge School Early Years Provision offers a friendly and welcoming Montessori environment. Staff members work well together in this small and supportive team under the clear leadership of the Head of Early Years. Following a recommendation made at the first reaccreditation visit, the management team has worked to enhance the understanding and promotion of the Montessori ethos across Early Years, making this a priority within the School Development Plan and improving the documentation which supports performance management of the staff. Peer observations could also now be employed to reinforce these recent developments.

The Early Years Provision has met the recommendation from the previous MEAB accreditation to improve the learning environment, including through the rearrangement of its furniture. It is working to meet another recommendation by organising Montessori training for staff. A further recommendation, to foster

children's skills of independence, has been very effectively implemented throughout the daily routines: they self-register on arrival and show high levels of independence during mealtimes. Staff members are familiar with their roles and responsibilities and foster many opportunities for children's growing independence. The rooms and outdoor areas have been thoughtfully laid out in accordance with this and are designed to create harmonious and stimulating learning environments. The team is continuing to review the resourcing and use of its own outdoor areas.

Parents speak highly of the quality of the practice and of the staff teams' open communication and knowledge of their child's progress. The team has very recently started using a comprehensive and secure online record-keeping system. Once fully embedded, its use will enable the team to streamline record-keeping for, and more effectively monitor, each child's progress across all areas of development. In addition to the many events that families may attend, their access to this system will also help enhance their knowledge of the Montessori approach, practice and opportunities for training. Following a period of prolonged change at this setting, this visionary staff team can now take pride in its knowledge and share its Montessori ethos with families.

***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:***

- the team should continue to improve the Early Years outdoor provision and use these areas to facilitate more mixing of its two age groups; and
- develop more formal and frequent peer observations to further assist staff members' evaluation of their Montessori practice.

#### **Philosophy:**

Brookes Cambridge School Early Years Provision offers a calm environment in which the team works hard to implement its Montessori approach. Staff members take every opportunity to see the child as an individual, to respect them and to provide for their needs and interests by creating a learning environment that is thoughtfully prepared and which promotes the development of their independence. Children are offered good opportunities and the trust to build on their self-initiated learning and self-discipline. The adults carefully observe each child and know the children very well, so they are able to 'follow the child' and provide opportunities that motivate each one; for example, staff members set up a 'café area' because a child demonstrated significant interest in serving snacks and drinks to peers.

Brookes Cambridge School's commitment to the Montessori approach is defined on its website, in 'An Introduction to Montessori' leaflet and in the policy documentation.

Following the first reaccreditation visit, the School Development Plan has been extended to prioritise the setting's commitment to providing excellent Montessori practice. This now includes specific targets, success criteria and evaluations. This development, in conjunction with renewed emphasis on the Montessori approach in the employee handbook, enhances staff members' understanding of good Montessori practice and enables them to work to achieve consistency in their approach.

### **Learning and Development:**

Brookes Cambridge School Early Years Provision has good opportunities for learning and development across most areas of the indoor and outdoor environment. Children in both Nursery and Reception are able to access their small outside areas throughout the work cycle. They happily move between their indoor and outdoor environments in following their choice of activity and the adults are adept at following children to the garden areas as required. Outside there is a good selection of interesting and diverse activities which have been thoughtfully laid out. Many activities here are based on physical skills and creative play, such as pavement painting, digging and sawdust play, and good opportunities are provided to learn about the natural world.

Indoors, the resources are arranged clearly and are easily accessible to encourage children's engagement with them. Staff members ensure that the range of learning materials genuinely reflects children's current interests and learning requirements, and rotate these with other resources as required. At both reaccreditation visits excellent resources were available for the children to learn more about the world and they demonstrated a good level of knowledge about Diwali and about volcanoes.

Long term plans are comprehensive; they span a two year period and are arranged in line with the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) areas of learning and development. The team works closely together using these to plan topics for each half-term. These plans are then reviewed each week at staff meetings to develop focused activities for all the children. Plans for each child's learning and development are drawn up by each key person, based on their observations and assessments; these are paper-based plans at present but are soon to be made available online. Following the first visit, staff members now use the online system to record their observations of children's learning and development. This system will enable them to monitor children's progress across the EYFS and Montessori curriculum and will allow the leadership team to review the effectiveness of the learning provision as a whole.

In both the Nursery and Reception staff members work towards an appropriate balance of adult-led and child-initiated activities during the morning work cycle; this lasts about two and a half hours in the Nursery and three hours in Reception. Good opportunities are offered for spontaneous learning and planned activities throughout the morning, for individual learning, exploration, small and whole group work. In the Nursery there is a whole group gathering at the end of the morning whereas in Reception this group tends to be offered at the start of the morning. Both these arrangements work well and children are familiar with these routines. Children's emotional development and self-confidence are supported by staff members' use of encouraging language.

Following lunch, sleeping mats are available in the Nursery for those who wish to rest. The Nursery and Reception children join together on certain afternoons for planned activities. On the afternoon of the first visit they played together in the school's playground for half an hour and then had Forest School for two hours. Staff members skillfully promote learning and discovery in these excellent outside areas and offer support to the younger children as they become familiar with the apparatus and routines. On other afternoons dance and yoga are available for the children.

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

The Early Years team takes every opportunity to ensure that resources in the Nursery and Reception are thoughtfully arranged and that the learning environment remains well organised throughout the sessions. In both rooms activities are appropriate for the ages and stages of the children and each offers separate and spacious areas of learning. There are attractive natural resources and hand-made materials, many of which have been made in response to the children's needs and interests. The addition of plants, flowers, a bright Continents mural and soft furnishings enhance the ambience of each room.

Both the Nursery and Reception rooms contain a good range and quality of Montessori activities, puzzles and books. The cultural area in each room is particularly engaging, being set up with interesting objects in clearly-marked baskets. Furniture is child-sized and arranged in ways to encourage children to work independently at a table, on the floor, or in small groups. Large carpets and small mats are available for whole group work or individual activities. The Nursery has excellent provision in the range and quality of resources available for children to learn about and paint in the style of different artists. In Reception a 'flower shop' has been set up, offering excellent opportunity for children's emotional, social and language development.

In both rooms staff members have developed well organised areas in which children select, prepare, eat and clear away their own snack. Children are familiar with the snack routines and take pride in their classrooms by clearing up spillages and washing dishes.

The small outdoor areas are carefully planned and set up each day to reflect children's current interests. There are puzzles, natural resources such as shells and conkers and implements for drawing and painting, however, some resources and furniture here appear rather worn. The team is continuing to review the resourcing of these small outdoor areas and to encourage mixing across the age ranges in order to enhance opportunities for co-operative play and further enrich language development. The school's garden and polytunnel provide excellent opportunities for learning about nature, for social and physical development. These areas of learning are also very well facilitated in the school's playground, playing field, and in the superbly designed and resourced Forest School area. The Forest School provision is a major strength of the school as it offers an outstanding environment for children's risk-taking, exploration, creative and imaginative play.

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

Throughout the daily routine in both the Nursery and Reception, the adults work hard to allow children time and freedom to successfully and independently complete tasks. They encourage them to find their own peg, hang up their own coats and bags and to be independent in their choice of activities throughout the day. In both rooms children are gently encouraged as they move between the different areas of learning throughout the work cycle, so that they are able to follow their interests and gain confidence from doing so. Children show independence by finding work mats, selecting resources and tidying away after themselves. There are good opportunities throughout the day for children to repeat activities and for individual and shared discovery. Children are given the freedom to join staff-led groups or to remain with other activities and they place their name card on their work if they wish to participate in an adult-led activity and later return to the work. In both rooms group times are used to gently remind children about the ground rules and about caring for each other.

Excellent opportunities are offered for children to develop independence and confidence during snack and mealtimes. In Reception a 'snack monitor' takes the children's orders and collects the snack from the kitchen located off the main school hall, this encourages both written and verbal skills. In both rooms children are reminded in advance when the snack table will close so they will have enough time to use it. In the Nursery they also demonstrate good self-care skills in hand washing, preparing fruit, pouring drinks and clearing up after themselves. Each room has resources for self-care, including a mirror and tissues, and items needed in helping to maintain the order of the rooms (e.g. for wiping up spillages). Lunch is provided in the hall of the main school, all the Early Years children eat together, they set the tables, counting cutlery and plates, and they scrape plates, tidy away dishes and wipe their table afterwards. Staff members sit at the tables with the children and act as excellent role models by demonstrating respect for others and good manners.

Staff members work very well as a small and dedicated team to ensure every opportunity is given for children to develop independence. Daily discussions with parents, newsletters and use of the new online system will together provide excellent opportunities for parents to feel involved in the life of the school and to learn about how independence is fostered.

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

The Early Years team has excellent links with families and parents speak highly of its dedicated and well informed staff. Children may arrive between 08.00 and 09.00, enabling them to be individually greeted and their parents to have the opportunity to talk about their child. Daily feedback on the child's progress is also given at the end of each day and each child has a communication diary. These are currently used to inform parents of upcoming events and any other information the staff team needs to share. Following changes made to the record-keeping system, the diary is to be replaced with

comprehensive online communication between home and school. Use of this new system will enable parents to see their child's observations and photographs, and provide them with the opportunity to share with staff evidence of their child's progress at home. It will also provide a platform for families to learn more about Montessori pedagogy, training and about the wider Montessori community.

Further opportunities for communication between the school and home include weekly informative newsletters, which highlight school events in the term ahead and also cover the Early Years' news and topics. Weekly updates are also sent home and the online system may be used for sending out these class updates. Regular events such as Harvest Festival and sports days offer additional occasions for parents to be involved in their child's life at the school. Children also take delight in selecting a book weekly from the school's library bus, which is fixed on site, and sharing the book at home with their family. Parents are then able to comment to staff about their child's enjoyment of the book.

Welcome evenings and parent evenings are arranged throughout the year and are generally well attended. At the end of the school year key persons prepare and share with parents comprehensive summative reports. Final reports that summarise development in each area of learning are also prepared by the key person when the child leaves Reception. These are shared with parents and with the child's next teacher.

Parents comment on the benefits of the open communication that they have with the school and, following a recommendation from the first reaccreditation visit, the staff team is now sharing more effectively its Montessori knowledge and practices with parents and across the school.

### **Staff: qualifications, deployment, and performance management**

There have been many changes to Brookes Cambridge School over recent years. Many of the Early Years staff members have remained at the school during this transition, which has helped foster good team work. The Head of Early Years and her team have developed good routines to ensure children are engaged and learning well. They take great pride in preparing the environment to make sure that it provides a good range of Montessori materials as well as many additional activities to stimulate children's interests.

There are robust recruitment, induction, performance management and training procedures in place. Following a recommendation from the first reaccreditation visit much of the documentation that supports these, such as the School Development Plan and employee handbook, now link specifically to Montessori principles. These can therefore now be used by the management to assess the adherence to, and consistency in, Montessori practice across the team.

The Head of Early Years undertakes and records informal supervisions, weekly team meetings and yearly staff appraisals. Performance management is thorough for all the Early Years' practitioners, and targets for each are set and reviewed. Peer to peer observations are informal; however, it may now be prudent to develop more rigorous

documentation for these and make them more frequently to enhance each staff member's own assessment of their Montessori practice and continuing professional development. Further training for staff is fully supported by Brookes Cambridge School. Montessori training has been booked for the Head of Early Years, staff meetings include training on aspects of Montessori provision and principles, and staff members attend Montessori conferences.

Under the visionary leadership and high expectations of the Head of Early Years, all staff members demonstrate commitment to their roles and responsibilities and clearly enjoy their work. They aim to offer excellent Montessori provision to children and their families by their dedication to 'following the child' and they continually strive to improve the quality of their service.

Name of Assessor: Carolyn O J McNeill

Date report submitted: First visit – 16<sup>th</sup> November 2017

Second visit – 1<sup>st</sup> May 2018