

## **Montessori Evaluation and Accreditation Board** **School Accreditation**

This report is a supplement to the setting's previous MEAB Accreditation Final Report, which is published in conjunction with this report.

**This report was prepared following, and is based on, two accreditation visits made on behalf of the Montessori Evaluation and Accreditation Board.** It considers how far the setting follows relevant criteria in "The Guide to the EYFS in Montessori Settings" (2012/14). During the second visit the progress made with the recommendations set out in the report from the first visit was assessed and any further findings made during the second visit were considered.

The report does not address the standards and quality issues that are assessed by the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted), which reports separately. Also the report does not provide any assessment of financial aspects of the setting.

Receiving accreditation carries the expectation that the setting will continue to work on the issues highlighted in this report and will remain committed to the ongoing development of its practice. Furthermore, that it 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.

### **The Denning Montessori School**

Fawley Village Hall, Henley-on-Thames, Oxfordshire RG9 6JA

Dates of previous MEAB accreditations: June 2012 and November 2015

This accreditation is valid until June 2023.

This accreditation report relates to the provision for children aged 2 to 4 years

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

The Denning Montessori School was established in 1991; it is privately owned and is situated on the outskirts of Henley. It serves the local rural and wider community. The nursery has one large classroom, one reception room, a kitchen and a small office. The reception room couples as additional indoor space for the children once sessions have begun. The outdoor area comprises two gardens, one of which is accessible to the children throughout the session. A second, larger garden is accessed through a gate from the small garden.

A copse nearby is used once a week for Forest School sessions. The nursery has access to its neighbour's field for nursery events and nature walks. Other local walks are also taken, such as to visit a sheep field and vineyard. Children attend the local church for celebrations such as Harvest Festival and the locality's flower display. Dance and

Mandarin classes are offered weekly and one week of holiday club is available in the summer.

The Denning Montessori School has sole use of the premises during its opening hours. The morning session during term times is from 09.10 to 12:25 on Mondays and Fridays, extending until 13:00 on Wednesdays. On Tuesdays and Thursdays the nursery stays open until 16:00. Children's snack and packed lunches are brought in from their home. The nursery chooses to operate with a maximum of 12 children in a session although it is registered for up to 18 children. At the second reaccreditation visit, there were 11 children present for the morning, with six staying on for the extended day session and one child attending for just the afternoon session.

There are four members of staff, three hold a Montessori international diploma and one has Early Years Teacher Status. They work a range of part-time shifts and help ensure that high staff/child ratios are maintained. The manager, who is also the owner, holds a Montessori international diploma and a Montessori primary qualification. She works in the setting full-time, with the deputy manager covering in her absence. Both are further supported by a second deputy. The manager and deputy manager hold Forest School Leader qualifications. On the day of the second visit, four members of staff were present in the morning, with two working the full day.

The nursery has experience of supporting children with special educational needs and/or disabilities and English as an additional language. It accesses additional support from the local authority as necessary.

## Summary

The Denning Montessori School offers children a secure and nurturing environment, where staff are totally dedicated to providing an authentic Montessori early years' experience. This long-established setting is led, and its staff mentored, by a Montessorian with extensive experience and an inspiring motivation to support children to follow their natural path of learning.

The nursery strives to maintain the high standards noted at the previous MEAB accreditation. It is fully committed to an ongoing cycle of reflective practice that allows staff to identify and implement strategies which support their vision of progress for the children and for the setting.

All staff are well qualified and have created a strong team ethos; this, along with their deep respect for the children, creates a positive learning environment where children are happy, busy and self-confident.

Parents speak very highly of the setting. In particular, they pinpoint the benefits their children gain from the freedom that they are offered in the classroom and from the regular access which they have to the rich and varied natural environment that the location offers. Parents indicate that they found the website informative when

choosing to send their child to the setting, as it offers a window into the provision and its aspirations. Since the first reaccreditation visit, the nursery has updated the website to further reflect its passion for progress.

The layout of the main classroom is open plan and well organised. Each area of the curriculum is very well resourced. All the children, regardless of age, thoroughly enjoy freely accessing all of the resources, indoors and outdoors. Following the first reaccreditation visit, staff now offer the children more opportunity for increased challenge, thereby enabling them to deepen their knowledge, skills and attention span. The smaller classroom/reception room offers children a cosy space to separate from their carer before starting their nursery day. Following a recommendation from the first visit, this room has been reorganised, with benches for the children to sit comfortably when removing their outdoor clothing. This has enhanced their independent transition into the nursery.

Since the previous MEAB accreditation, the nursery has introduced a secure digital record-keeping system to capture the children's learning and development, and parents can access their child's portfolio on this via a password-protected webpage. Parents appreciate the information this system gives them on their child's most recent achievements. The digital system is also used to support staff's planning for individual and group activities. Following the first visit, staff have worked to achieve a better balance of child-initiated and adult-led activities. This further enhances children's learning experiences, critical thinking skills and inner discipline.

The Denning Montessori School is a setting that places the child at the heart of everything it does. Children benefit tremendously from the many years' of experience the nursery's staff have to offer and from the passion and drive that enables them to provide a warm and welcoming learning environment.

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

- It is recommended that the setting continues to reflect upon and develop its practice in order to ensure that high standards are maintained.

**An Action Plan has been drawn up with, and retained by, the setting to address this recommendation.**

**Philosophy:**

The staff team's understanding of, and dedication to, the Montessori principles and ethos is reflected throughout the nursery. Staff recognise the child's need to explore and experiment with the materials they have access to, and their engagement is respected and celebrated, including by the children themselves. "I did it!" was a refrain heard

several times during the first reaccreditation visit. Children thoroughly enjoy the time they spend at the nursery; they are kind and caring and work eagerly and co-operatively together. On occasion, they need reminding of the ground rules. Following a recommendation from the first visit, the children have been helped to create pictorial/photographic guides that communicate these ground rules. These child-inspired visual prompts have proven to be very useful in helping the children remember the ground rules for the benefit of them all.

The Montessori philosophy is well documented on the nursery's recently updated website, which gives clear insight into the vision staff hold for all of the children who attend. The manager and staff team are very passionate about delivering a Montessori experience that will enable every child to work to their potential.

### **Learning and Development:**

Children benefit from a three-hour work cycle and the opportunities it offers to spontaneously engage with their chosen tasks. All are familiar with the cycle of activity and work hard to help maintain their environment. Children manage their free flow between the indoor and outdoor spaces very well and staff are always on hand to help with outdoor clothing and footwear should it be necessary. On the day of the first reaccreditation visit children enjoyed cutting and squeezing oranges to make their own juice for snack and embraced many opportunities that help them develop their manipulative skills. These form an excellent foundation for developing other skills, such as pre-writing dexterity.

Staff are very good role models and offer children a rich language environment and appropriate levels of narration to inspire their curiosity and engagement. They benefit from a good range of teacher planned adult-led activities that challenge their critical thinking skills. The children's individual developmental needs are planned for based on their current interests and curiosities. Staff know the children well and have created a warm and respectful community which involves the children in celebrating much of what the local area has to offer; the children's cultural immersion is enhanced by their access to the wider locality.

The digital record-keeping system links the Montessori curriculum with the Early Years Foundation Stage and is used effectively by staff to give parents a full and up-to-date report of their child's progress. Children's achievements are recorded daily by their key person and a selection of these, along with suggested next steps for learning, are shared with the child's parents weekly.

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

The nursery's layout encourages the children to explore and engage with the wide range of well-maintained Montessori materials and the very good range of other early years resources. All areas of the Montessori curriculum are clearly defined, and the

arrangement of the small tables and easily accessible shelving in the main classroom lends itself to providing children with an enabling environment. In addition to the Montessori curriculum areas, children also have access to a cosy book corner (where they can rest if they need to), and to a well-equipped creative area where their 'masterpieces' are created – these are beautifully displayed around the classroom. Children have access to a wide range of role-play resources, musical instruments and sand play in the reception room, which adds to the range of learning experiences they can freely engage in.

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

Children at The Denning Montessori School have a wealth of opportunities to develop their emerging independence. On entering the building, they have the ideal space to hang their coats, remove their shoes and retrieve their indoor footwear. This start of day routine is well supported by having a visual guide clearly illustrating the steps to follow, as well as having space to sit, a place to hang clothing and a clearly labelled storage space for snack and packed lunches, all within close proximity.

Children enjoy being trusted to fill the hand washbasin before having snack and understand that they must empty the basin afterwards. They enjoy using the nursery's child-sized brushes, pans and mops, and eagerly help to tidy their environment. They are very comfortable and confident within the nursery and parents express that they also demonstrate these attributes in the wider environment.

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

The nursery has excellent relationships with its parent group, who speak very highly of the owner, the staff team and the range of experiences their children enjoy. They particularly value the wide range of outside visits the nursery offers and the direct access they have to their child's learning portfolio via the digital system the nursery now uses. During the first reaccreditation visit everyone was looking forward to the upcoming trip to the fire station. Parents enjoy having access to the parent library and appreciate being able to attend parent courses that are regularly run by the staff. This is an area of great strength for the nursery.

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

The owner and staff at The Denning Montessori School are well qualified and have a broad range of early years' experience. They understand the requirements and responsibilities of their roles very well. Staffing is another area of strength for the nursery. Children benefit from the adults' ability to work well together and to deploy themselves where they are needed throughout the day. Staff interact with, and react to, the children with care and affection; they firmly believe that the children can be assisted to work towards their full potential.

Staff supervision takes place termly and this is used to identify areas for continuing professional development. Staff's peer to peer observation is also used as a development tool, with every member of the team observing and feeding back to colleagues throughout the academic year.

The Denning Montessori School is a nursery that offers children a place to grow, learn and thrive and the owner and staff team's positive approach towards reflective practice and the continuous development of the nursery is highly commendable.

Name of Assessor(s): Deborah Penny

Date of first visit: 6<sup>th</sup> March 2019

Date of second visit: 7<sup>th</sup> May 2019

Date report submitted: First visit – 11<sup>th</sup> March 2019

Second visit – 8<sup>th</sup> May 2019