



# **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.

### **The New Montessori Pre-school**

Methodist Church, Tarring Road, Worthing, Sussex BN11 4ET

Date of previous MEAB accreditation: November 2012

Date of first re-accreditation visit: 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2015

Date of second re-accreditation visit: 18<sup>th</sup> February 2016

This accreditation report relates to the provision for children aged 2 to 5 years



### **Description of the pre-school:**

The New Montessori Pre-school was established in 1999. It is a registered charity which is governed by a Management Committee of six persons, made up of past and current parents of the pre-school along with representatives from the local community. There is a Principal and a School Manager who are responsible for the day to day running of the setting.

The pre-school has sole use of its premises, which include a small chapel building with an integral adjoining hall; these rooms are set out as two open-plan classrooms, with the chapel space being the larger of the two. Both rooms have a complete range of Montessori materials available to the children. The premises also have a small sensory room, kitchen, office, toilets/changing facilities and direct access to a secure outdoor play space, and a separate secure outdoor space for parents waiting to drop off/meet their children. The pre-school serves the local community of its residential, urban location. It is widely multi-cultural, reflecting the diversity of the community. It offers full support for children with special education needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and children with English as an additional language.

The 52 place pre-school operates from 08:00 to 18:00 Monday to Friday throughout the year, offering a range of sessions to meet the needs of its families; 'Early Birds' can attend from 08:00, with the morning session running from 09:30 until 12:30. There is a lunch club from 12:30 to 13:30, an afternoon session from 13:30 to 16:30, and 'Late Owls' from 16:30 to 18:00. Children can attend a single session in any one day and a combination of sessions throughout the week. At the time of the second re-accreditation visit there were 84 children enrolled, with 31 children attending the morning session and 22 in the afternoon. All those attending the afternoon session join the lunch club, bringing a packed lunch. Snacks are offered at regular times throughout the day. Children are not assigned to a particular classroom or age group, they can choose which area of the setting to work in.

The pre-school currently employs 17 members of staff, five of whom work full time; other staff members work part time on a schedule that meets the needs and number of children attending. On the day of the second visit nine staff members and one student worked to cover the morning session and the lunch club, with four staff members and one student covering the afternoon session. The Principal and School Manager both work full time and hold Montessori diplomas; two of the remaining full time staff hold Montessori diplomas and one has an early years degree. Of the part time staff, three hold Montessori qualifications and one is currently working towards this; the rest of the team hold a range of early years' qualifications, and one is currently undertaking an apprenticeship in early years.

### **Summary**



The New Montessori Pre-school is a well-established, thriving community setting. The management and staff team are evidently committed to offering the children a balanced and stimulating educational experience which closely follows the ethos and principles of the Montessori method of education linked to the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) framework. Most of the staff team are very long serving. They work well together and make the most of their recognised strengths. Staff members are well qualified and their knowledge and experience, along with their profound respect for one another, combine to offer the children high level, consistent support in all areas of their development.

Children are very comfortable in their environment; they confidently access a wide range of Montessori materials and other resources throughout the minimum three hour work cycles of both the morning and afternoon sessions. Children intuitively follow the cycle of activity, with only occasional reminders needed for them to tidy away their activities. Staff know all of the children very well; this knowledge, along with their daily recording and reviews of children's progress, helps ensure that all of the children benefit from being introduced to challenging activities well-matched to their development.

Parent feedback reflects the excellent relationships that the staff team has with both the children and their families; they are particularly complimentary about the web-based record-keeping system that the pre-school uses, which allows them to review and feed into their children's learning experiences. Parents value having direct access to their children's development records and the fact that they can contribute ideas for next steps, working together with staff to extend learning opportunities for their children.

Following recommendations from the previous MEAB accreditation the nursery has reviewed and developed the ways it analyses and evaluates its recording of children's learning experiences and progress, using a continuous review cycle. The recommendations from the first re-accreditation visit have been used to enhance its practice. In particular, the child's voice is now evident throughout the setting, as captured in the displays and the curricular provision.

**The school 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 pre-school continues to reflect on its practice in order to ensure that high standards are maintained.



## **Philosophy:**

The pre-school wholeheartedly embraces Montessori philosophy; every member of staff is adept at allowing the children to lead their own learning journey. Children thrive on their freedom to explore the resources and easily become absorbed in their chosen or directed activities. Their choices are acknowledged and respected by staff members, who know them very well and use this knowledge to extend the children's learning experiences. The child is at the heart of this Montessori pre-school. Since the first re-accreditation visit it now uses visual displays to share effectively the children's thoughts and opinions of their pre-school and learning experiences.

All children receive individual attention throughout the work cycle. Group activities, both spontaneous and planned, are appropriately led or watched over to ensure positive outcomes for each child involved. Children's achievements are highly valued and consistently celebrated. Following a recommendation from the first visit, the pre-school now makes regular use of iPads, not just to digitally record children's learning but also to share these records with the children concerned. The children delight in seeing that their learning has been captured and benefit from the rich shared language that is the outcome of this joint review of learning. The children eagerly discuss what they have done and can do with their key person who in turn uses this opportunity to provoke focus and further learning.

Children are very confident. They establish a sense of community that exemplifies the Montessori value of children being "citizens of the world". The vertical age grouping sees children comfortably engage with and support one another. Children know the routine of the sessions very well and politely remind one another of the ground rules saying, "Don't shout, you'll hurt someone's ears!" They benefit from being trusted to discuss and negotiate challenges that arise as they play together. Where adult intervention is necessary staff use age-appropriate language to politely remind children of social and etiquette expectations.

Since the first visit the parent information literature has been updated to illustrate clearly the pre-school's mission statement and enhance understanding of its commitment to the Montessori ethos. The well-developed website provides a plethora of information on its Montessori vision and values, as well as an abundance of other relevant information for prospective parents. Parents cite the website as being a very useful source of information.



## **Learning and Development:**

The well planned learning environment provides the children with a wide range of materials and activities that promote curiosity, exploration and discovery. The resources are laid out to reflect the Montessori curriculum and to allow space for children to engage in construction activities, small world play and imaginary play on a larger scale. Both classrooms have materials that engage children in all aspects of the curriculum, with the smaller hall also being used for planned enhancement activities.

The environment is calm and busy; children across the age range confidently access materials and display high levels of engagement with their chosen activities throughout the work cycles. They can choose to be indoors or out. Staff work extremely well with children on a one to one basis and actively look for opportunities to engage children in sustained shared thinking through their expert use of open-ended questions. They are skilled at presenting new materials to the children in a manner that encourages them to confidently work independently with the resources at a later stage. In group situations staff members make excellent use of descriptive language and narratives in an age-appropriate manner to enable the children to achieve the desired learning outcomes.

Where children need extra support, staff members are expert at engaging them in stimulating and rewarding experiences. Parents of children with SEND speak very highly of the help both they and their child receive from the pre-school, including securing appropriate input from external agencies.

The pre-school operates a key person system for the purpose of recording children's day to day activity and overall progress and development. Key persons plan for their key children; however, the school also follows the children's interests and learning holistically, with all staff feeding into the recording, planning and implementation process. Staff plan children's experiences on both a whole group and individual level; they make very good use of the web-based recording system to highlight needs and interests. Since the first re-accreditation visit the pre-school now makes full use of the system to identify gaps in children's learning experiences and in the provision in general; this deeper analysis promotes exemplary practice throughout the setting.

The pre-school carries out mandatory two year old progress checks and is currently working with the local authority and health teams to pilot their approach to the new Integrated Review.



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

The pre-school offers the children a very favourable learning environment with a wide range of high quality resources to suit all their needs and interests. The materials are attractively arranged to encourage the children's engagement with them and allow for a logical progression from early involvement to more complex abstract concepts. Throughout the pre-school children benefit from areas to work individually and in groups.

In response to a recommendation made at the first re-accreditation visit, the staff and Management Committee reviewed the labeling of the curriculum areas in order to consider changing them to match current Montessori terminology. They concluded that their preference is to continue to use the titles of the curriculum areas as recorded by Dr Montessori, demonstrating their commitment to self-evaluation and their confidence in their unique provision.

The free flow access outdoor learning environment encourages exploration of concepts on a larger scale. There is a play house, a mud kitchen, planting area, a selection of wheeled vehicles, wall mounted activities that allow the children to explore scientific concepts such as gravity, and a small covered gazebo that at the time of the visits was being used as a garage for the bicycles. The children also have access to large block play outdoors.

The majority of the resources are continuously available to the children; however, the pre-school also has good storage facilities that allow staff to rotate additional resources to meet the changing interests of the children. Enhancement activities are well planned and resources for these are prepared in advance so that the children's involvement and ability to follow the cycle of activity is not interrupted by a lack of accessible resources or space.

The children and staff display a high level of respect for their environment; the children have an excellent knowledge of where to locate the resources and are well versed in helping to maintain their resources.



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

Throughout the pre-school children are given the freedom to choose the learning experiences; the youngest need little direction to access the resources independently. Since the first re-accreditation visit the pre-school has developed its use of photographic images to support children's engagement in the curriculum areas. Staff facilitate the children's independence through their choice of language and do not intervene unnecessarily but are immediately available to offer 'tips for success' or physical help should it be required.

Children are free to choose when they access the snack area and whether they become involved in the preparation and serving of the snack foods. There is an established routine for disposing of waste and clearing and cleaning the crockery, cutlery and other items used during both snack and lunch club, which further develops the children's independence. Children do not usually sleep at the setting but there are 'comfort zones' with a good range of cushions and other soft furnishings should they need to sleep or rest during the morning or afternoon.

The pre-school has a widely multi-cultural population and this is reflected in the materials available to the children and in the enhancement activities offered. Children's independence is further promoted by the vertical age grouping; the younger children are happy to engage with the older children and the older children can actively seek out those who are younger or new to the environment to offer support and interaction.

Parents comment favourably on how the children's independence extends into the home environment, where their children can help out and do things for themselves.



### **Montessori practice: Classroom management**

Staff members recognise one another's strengths and skills and work in a highly effective manner to ensure that the children are well supervised and expertly guided during the whole of the day. When not directly engaged with the children, staff can be found discussing children's development and making plans to meet their needs and interests. Data recorded on the pre-school's digital system is used to analyse practice and to inform the setting's on-going improvement plan.

The setting benefits from having a supernumerary Principal and School Manager; they have an excellent overview of the needs of the children and the daily deployment of staff, leaving the staff free to focus on the children. Team members in each class are allocated a research day, with additional staff being used as support wherever they might be required. The whole team is involved in the daily planning and all of them regularly work with all of the children, although each key person is responsible for updating records of their key children's activities, for identifying next steps and for maintaining close contact with parents regarding the children's general wellbeing. Overall, there is a good balance of child-initiated and teacher-led activities throughout each session; key activities are repeated so that children who attend only a morning or afternoon session have the same range of opportunities.

There is a robust range of policies and procedures, which are regularly reviewed and updated by the Principal before being shared with the staff team in their meetings. The Principal and School Manager work closely together to inspire and support the staff, thus creating a highly motivated, respectful and very effective staff team.





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

The pre-school's staff has excellent relationships with the parents; they are met at the entrance to the nursery by the Principal and School Manager who take note of comments regarding the children's general welfare and wellbeing. These notes are uploaded onto the digital recording system and shared directly with the staff team. Parents accompany their children into the pre-school and have the chance to talk to their child's key person or any member of staff about their child.

The online records are securely encrypted; parents and staff have individual passwords to access them at any time. The records are updated each day. Parents particularly like being able to access their child's development records at a time that suits them and they comment favourably on the system, saying that they feel it allows them to engage in their children's learning and have direct contact with the nursery. Parents also report that they enjoy being able to comment on what their children do outside of the pre-school and that these comments are taken into account by staff and, where possible, used to inform the planning of activities.

Parents feel very well informed about the pre-school's settling-in procedures, daily routines, the Montessori approach to education and the EYFS; they are complimentary about the informative and well laid out website. There are parent notice boards inside and outside the nursery and regular parent newsletters are distributed.

Parents value the expertise of the team and feel that they know their children very well. Parents are invited regularly to meet with the staff to discuss their children's progress and the web-based system is used by the pre-school to generate assessments which are shared effectively with parents. The nursery works closely with local schools in preparing a final report for when the child leaves the setting and makes arrangements for Reception teachers to visit the child during one of their regular pre-school sessions.

The setting works very closely with families to ensure that every parent has the same opportunity to interact with them, this sometimes involves finding interpreters or turning to other parents to ask for their help with interpretation; parents are keen to volunteer to help with such matters to support the pre-school's community ethos. There is a Fundraising Committee that organises regular events locally, to which all the parents are invited. The parent-run Management Committee adds further strength to the parent/pre-school partnership.



## **Staffing:**

The staff group at The New Montessori Pre-school exemplifies team cohesion; they work exceptionally well together to ensure that the pre-school consistently reflects the principles and ethos of the Montessori approach to education. The very low staff turnover contributes to the children receiving an exemplary level of care and the combined experience and knowledge of the team members is used effectively so that every child is given the fullest opportunity to reach their potential.

The staff members are well qualified, seven hold Montessori diplomas and all, except for one in a support role, hold or are working towards nationally recognised early years' childcare or teaching qualifications. The robust recruitment procedure ensures that new staff and any volunteers that join the nursery undergo a full and thorough induction. The team attends regular mandatory training and continued professional development events organised by the local authority, the Montessori Schools Association and other professional organisations. The pre-school also provides a range of in-house training, informed by its regular supervision and appraisal processes. It has developed very effective strategies to support and mentor staff members and is now using key person data obtained from the digital recording system as a starting point for supervision meetings and staff development plans.

Regular staff meetings support the team in developing their practice to meet the needs of the children they care for. A written action plan is developed from each staff meeting, which allows individuals to take on responsibility for areas of development. The pre-school's SENCo provided training to support any identified special or additional needs that children on the roll may have.

The dedication and excellent organisational skills of the leadership team inspire the staff to achieve a high level of day to day practice. This pre-school wholeheartedly embraces the philosophy, principles and ethos of Montessori education.

Name of Assessor: Deborah Penny

Date report submitted: First visit – 1<sup>st</sup> November 2015

Second visit – 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2016