



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.

Westwood Montessori

Spriggs Yard, Little Samford, Saffron Walden, Essex CB10 2SA

Date of previous MEAB accreditation: June 2012

Date of first re-accreditation visit: 23 April 2015

Date of second re-accreditation visit: 5 November 2015

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

Description of the school

Westwood Montessori is one of five nurseries run by a charity in conjunction with a board of trustees. This group registered in 2008 but Westwood Montessori pre-school was established in 2006.

The setting is located in a converted barn on a farm and consists of two classrooms, a large reception area, lavatory facilities, a kitchen and staffroom. There is also a new, separate office for administration. The nursery room is for children up to 2½ years old and the pre-school room is for those from 2½ to 5 years of age. There is a large outdoor play space, half of which is paved and covered and the rest is grass. There is also an area in the adjacent field that is used for 'Forest School'. The setting has sole use of its garden and indoor facilities.

There are currently 67 children enrolled. On the day of the second re-accreditation visit 27 attended in the morning, of whom eight were under 2½ years, and 17 in the afternoon, with four being under 2½ years old. One child came just for the afternoon.



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.

Westwood Montessori is open during term time, from Monday to Friday, and runs morning and afternoon sessions, with some children staying all day. The morning session runs from 09.00 to 13.00 and the afternoon from 12.30 to 15.00, with an overlap for lunch.

The principal is in regular attendance but is not included on the staff rota; she is actively involved in all five settings in the group. There is an operations and communication manager, responsible for the day to day running of the setting, who is supernumerary and works part time, and a pre-school manager, who has overall responsibility and works full time. There are three other full time members of staff, one of whom is leader of the nursery room. The remaining ten work part time. One member of staff is responsible for administration and training and there is also a school bursar. On the day of the second re-accreditation visit four members of staff worked in the nursery room and six in the pre-school room.

The principal holds a full Montessori diploma together with a degree in Childhood and Youth Studies and has Early Years Professional Status (EYPS). Eleven members of staff overall hold a Montessori qualification and four are currently working towards one. The pre-school manager has an early years foundation degree as well as a Montessori diploma, and the room leader of the nursery room has a Norland diploma and a Montessori certificate.

Children bring fruit in to share during the sessions and those who stay for lunch bring a packed meal from home.

Summary

Westwood Montessori provides a warm, caring and nurturing environment in which each child is valued and respected as a unique individual. The purpose built premises are of outstanding quality. High levels of trust and respect for the children among the staff make this a vibrant learning environment. The team show care and consideration towards the children; they give them a sense of responsibility, self-discipline and respect for each other, and they encourage a high level of independence. Very effective partnerships are formed with the parents to help ensure the needs of the children are met appropriately. Strong emphasis is placed on social development and spiritual awareness. The team combine the requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) and the Montessori principles effectively, skillfully linking them together with the help of the recently introduced web-based recording system.



The setting has fully met the recommendation from the last MEAB re-accreditation by continuing to adapt and develop its outstanding outside space, which now includes a specially designed 'jabadeo' soft play area where children can stretch and roll on soft mats. Part of the current development plan is to extend the internal space further by adding to the lunch area. The staff have worked hard to implement the recommendations from the first re-accreditation visit: some of the materials have been replaced, the lunch routine has been successfully re-organized and documentation is now up to date. The staff work very well as a team and enjoy their work. The way they have embraced the recent changes is testimony to their desire to improve their practice. The management and team are committed to continuously evaluating provision and building on their achievements for the benefit of all the children in their care.

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

Philosophy:

Westwood Montessori provides a warm, friendly and stimulating learning environment and a happy atmosphere in which children are encouraged to reach their full potential. The aim of the setting is to provide an environment that encourages concentration, independence and self-motivation in a non-competitive atmosphere. Each child is treated as an individual and the holistic approach and broad provision cater for all areas of a child's learning and development, with a strong emphasis on respect and consideration for others as well as for the animals in their care.

The school's aims and objectives are stated in the prospectus and on the website, where there is an explanation of the Montessori philosophy and of how the school adheres to this in practice. The comprehensive school handbook includes its development plan. Partnership with parents is excellent and the parents are very appreciative of the effort the staff put in to keep them informed. Literature about Montessori education and the EYFS is available to parents.

There are opportunities to review the daily procedures, planning and goals in both classrooms through twice-termly formal staff meetings and good verbal communication throughout the team. Regular meetings are organized between all the managers of the nurseries in the group to ensure that consistency is maintained and good practice is shared and adhered to. A strong emphasis is placed on training and the management provides the team with many opportunities for continued professional development.



Learning and Development:

The managers of all five settings discuss long term planning collectively. Their planning incorporates the yearly cycle of seasons and seasonal events, which are reflected fully in this learning environment. Planning for topic work and the environment, both inside and out, is comprehensive. Short and medium term planning for the children is personalized to meet their individual needs. All the setting's staff members meet regularly to plan the activities jointly. The partnership that has been established with the parents is an integral part of the children's assessment process and in order to promote this partnership, the parents contribute information on their child in their 'My Montessori book', verbally and during formal meetings, as well through the web-based record keeping system.

The children enjoy self-initiated individual activity and spontaneous groups, which give them opportunities to investigate, explore and be creative. The planned topic is integrated into some of the activities, and observations are used to assist future planning. On the day of the first re-accreditation visit the children were celebrating St George's day, and on the second visit children were making pictures of fireworks using water pistols appropriately to fire paint onto paper. The securely kept digital records are compiled by staff and reflect the progressive nature of the children's learning. They combine the Montessori and EYFS areas of learning.

Westwood Montessori provides rich learning opportunities for all the children attending and embraces all seven areas of learning in the EYFS. Children are able to access activities both indoors and outdoors. On the day of the second visit a child was engrossed in matching different coloured leaves to pieces in a Montessori Colour Box, effectively making the connection between the outside and inside learning environments. The Montessori areas of learning are clearly defined in each room and outside. The uninterrupted work cycles allow the children plenty of opportunity to refine their skills.

The team establishes firm partnerships with parents and with external agencies to secure appropriate interventions for children with additional needs or English as an additional language. They work closely with the Specialist Teaching Service for the benefit of the children who need extra help and Westwood Montessori has recently been recognized as an outstanding setting for children with autism, having been awarded a 'Good Beginnings' bronze certificate.

Prepared Environment: resources and materials

This outstanding, purpose built environment is very light and welcoming. The two rooms are separately set up to accommodate the different age ranges of the children. The pre-school classroom is well laid out and the areas are clearly defined and prepared in accordance with the Montessori philosophy. The activities on all the curriculum area



shelves are accessible and generally appealing. Following the recommendations from the first re-accreditation visit some of the sensorial materials indoors have been updated and care has been taken to ensure that Montessori materials outside are complete. This pre-school room also has a snack area, book corner and an area used for messy or wet play. A captivating gecko is housed in a tank in the cultural area, which the children can handle with adult support.

Both the rooms are very well organized, clean and all the activities are age-appropriate, ready for use, complete and interesting. There is plenty of space for the children to work on their own or as part of a group. The team encourage the children to use the art materials, and evidence of their artwork is displayed attractively. The reception area is currently being transformed, which will enable it to be used for small group activities.

The younger children also have a very attractive classroom, which has been designed to cater especially for their needs. This nursery room has sufficient space for the children to move around safely and there are soft cushions for them to lie on. There is a partitioned quiet area with cots for those that need to sleep, a nappy changing area, and plenty of places for the children to explore. The materials for the children to use have been selected with their age and stage of development in mind. Climbing equipment, chunky puzzles, treasure baskets full of natural materials and some early Montessori resources are all in evidence. The outside space for the nursery room is separated from the pre-school children's area by a low fence but the children can play together on the grassed area as both their individual zones have gates leading to this shared space.

All the children enjoy an outstandingly varied outside classroom that covers all areas of learning comprehensively. Animals are a very endearing feature of this school. Guinea pigs, ducks, a gecko and fish are kept, as well as chickens which the children helped incubate from eggs. Occasionally pigs are brought into a neighbouring field. The children are able to handle the smaller animals and help care for them. There is also a willow bird hide for the children (this is used as a music area), a large planting area and a huge sand pit. On the day of the second re-accreditation visit a boy was sitting on a toy digger, using the bucket to dig a deep hole. A story-telling gazebo was installed after the last MEAB re-accreditation, which has proved very popular, and the newly acquired soft play area is also very well designed. The mud kitchen is another popular destination and on the day of the first visit a boy was making a 'cake', describing the process as he stirred and assured the visiting adult that it was going to be delicious. Daffodils have been planted in a spiral to add an extra dimension to the excellent natural experiences.

The team are considering their use of signing and the provision of visual timetables, especially to support the development of the younger age group and those with English as an additional language.



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

There are many opportunities for children to develop independence and follow established routines during their time at Westwood Montessori. The children show a very high level of respect for the environment and readily respond to the expectations of those who work with them. They help to keep their rooms clean and tidy and even very young children put their work back on the shelves when they have finished. On the day of both re-accreditation visits the library bus came and children in the nursery room were able to help the staff find the books needing to be returned, as a simple identification system has been employed. Staff promote respect by effective role-modeling. The children are learning the difference between right and wrong and the adults sensitively support this by helping them to understand the consequences of their actions or words. Children work effectively in groups or individually, making friends and learning to have regard for each other's needs. The children also learn to manage their own personal hygiene, with appropriate supervision.

Children in the pre-school room have a rolling snack time, which is well monitored. They wash up plates and cups and are encouraged to recycle packaging into the recycling bin. The younger children have a group snack but a degree of independence is encouraged, with the children washing up when they have finished if they are able. The children sit in small groups of three or four to eat together with a member of staff.

The relationship that the school has with the parents is highly effective and they value the excellent partnership, which supports the progress their children make. Extensive information is available for parents on the website, in the prospectus and termly newsletters, as well as on the noticeboard and through verbal communication. The parents interviewed on both of the re-accreditation visits said that they tried to encourage their children to be independent at home. The password-protected web-based system is used by staff to keep the parents well informed of their children's progress and the school operates an open door policy.

Montessori practice: Classroom management

The morning work cycle in the nursery room is a minimum of 2¾ hours long and is punctuated by the mid-morning snack. The youngest children follow their own routines for sleeping and eating. The children stay in this room until they are almost 2½ years of age. The older children have a morning work cycle of almost three hours as they break for lunch at around 11.45. All the children have time to self-select and learn at their own pace in this very well prepared learning environment for an uninterrupted period of time suitable for their age and stage of development.

A well-embedded system of accessing the outside area means that the pre-school children can play outside easily at any time during each work cycle. The covered area is opened first and then later in the morning the children have access to the field. The



nursery children also use the outside area with the support of the adults during the whole morning work cycle. As the younger ones gain confidence they can join the older children on the field, as there are connecting gates. The afternoon work cycle begins when the children finish lunch at about 12.30 until they go home at 15.00. Circle time is available at the end of both the sessions in the pre-school room and the children can decide if they wish to join. Activities such as cooking and yoga are also available, and plans for these activities are always discussed in advance with the children, who can then choose whether or not to participate. Musical instruments are used and parents with musical knowledge bring in their own instruments to share with the children.

Following the first re-accreditation visit, staff have fundamentally changed the lunch arrangements so that both adults and children now start eating at the same time, all use china plates, unpack their lunch boxes and wait until everyone is ready before they start eating. The children have responded very well to this change of routine. Lunch is now more calm and communal, with a smoother transition to it and greater promotion of the Montessori ethos of grace and courtesy and respect for others. The way the staff include the children in the day to day routines is an outstanding feature of this school.

The transition for the children between the two rooms is done gradually. The children are extremely well supported by their key person during the process. The adults in the team occasionally swap between the two rooms as necessary and are flexible in their deployment. If the older children need to sleep they are taken to the nursery room. However, on the day of the first re-accreditation visit a child who normally does not sleep at school was able to use the 'Cozy Corner' instead. Plans are in place to have all the children from both rooms eating together which will further facilitate the young children's transition to the pre-school room and enable them to see the older children's levels of independence.

As some of the staff work part time, care is taken to match the key person's days with the child's attendance. The classroom leaders ensure that cover is available for the children when their key person is absent. The teamwork in this setting is outstanding. Staff observe the children effectively and only intervene when necessary and in an appropriate manner.

One member of staff has overall responsibility for checking the indoor and outdoor environment and this is also overseen by another member of staff. Forest School provision is offered all year round for children aged, or approaching, 4 years old; children attend on a voluntary basis.

Montessori Practice: links with parents, including reports and records

All the key persons are responsible for recording the children's learning and progress on the digital record keeping system. They make sure that planning and the next steps are updated regularly. They are also responsible for completing summative reports such as the mandatory two year old progress check and transition documents. Parents and staff



also contribute information in the child's 'My Montessori book'. This book includes the child's own work, narrative observations and photographs, as well as a termly questionnaire for the adults to complete with the child to seek their opinions and preferences. This paper system is comprehensive. The babies also each have a booklet, which is used very effectively to ensure that parents are kept up to date with their child's eating and care routines. This information could be conveyed via the digital record-keeping system, but one of the outstanding features of this school is the extra effort staff members make by using their paper records as well as the digital ones. Care is taken to ensure that both staff and parents support the toddlers fully during their transition to the pre-school room.

Staff help ensure that children are well supported during their transition to school. They complete a transition document that is provided by the local authority and teachers from the next school are invited to visit the children before they leave. This combination of procedures provides a comprehensive assessment of the leavers' progress.

While the setting does not offer parents evenings, the open door policy, daily contact and digital records keep the parents effectively up to date with their children's progress. Newsletters are generally generated once a term but can be sent out more regularly if the need arises. Parents report that they are very happy with the contact they have with the setting. The combination of the digital records, 'My Montessori books', narrative observations, photographs and samples of work, and the parents' contributions, together ensure that Westwood Montessori has an excellent planning, recording and assessment procedure in place, which ensures that children continue to develop at their own rate and make significant progress. Partnership with parents is excellent.

Staffing:

The well qualified principal works hard to further develop the existing good practice and demonstrates a profound commitment to the school, while delegating the day to day running to the very proficient operations and communication manager, pre-school manager and nursery room leader. The pre-school manager is also well qualified and has EYPS. The majority of the staff team have a Montessori qualification, or are working towards one, as well other appropriate early years qualifications.

The induction procedure is very effective and members of staff who have joined recently have felt very well supported. The job descriptions and personnel procedures share the same format throughout the group. Following the first re-accreditation visit the managers now ensure that all information held in the school on the staff is up to date. Peer observations, supervision and appraisals are embedded and significant emphasis is placed on self-reflective practice.

Photographs of the staff are displayed with the list of their key person responsibilities and their designated roles. Roles such as first aid and safeguarding are delegated to qualified members of staff who undergo extensive training to support their responsibilities. One member of staff has recently undertaken training on 'How to be a



behaviour detective' which has had a positive impact on her work. Two members of staff are currently undertaking Forest School training. Continued professional development is a particular strength of this setting, and there is the opportunity for staff to share ideas by visiting the other nurseries in the group. Regular formal staff meetings are held and minutes are written and kept on the premises. The managers are able to approve funding for everyday resources and training but the board of trustees is consulted to approve any major items of expenditure.

One of the outstanding features of the school is that the environment is exceptionally calm and fosters co-operative play very well. The setting's decision to apply for re-accreditation is a further sign of the team's dedication to continuous improvement and to the provision of a high quality Montessori education.

Name of Assessor: Charlotte White

Date report submitted: First visit – 26 April 2015

Second visit – 6 November 2015