

Collaborative Montessori Accreditation (CMA) Report

Name of Assessor: Antonella Cirillo

Date/s of Assessment Visit: 7th March 2024

Name of Setting: Westwood Montessori

Address of Setting: Spriggs Yard, Thaxted Road, Little Sampford, Saffron Walden, Essex CB10 2SA

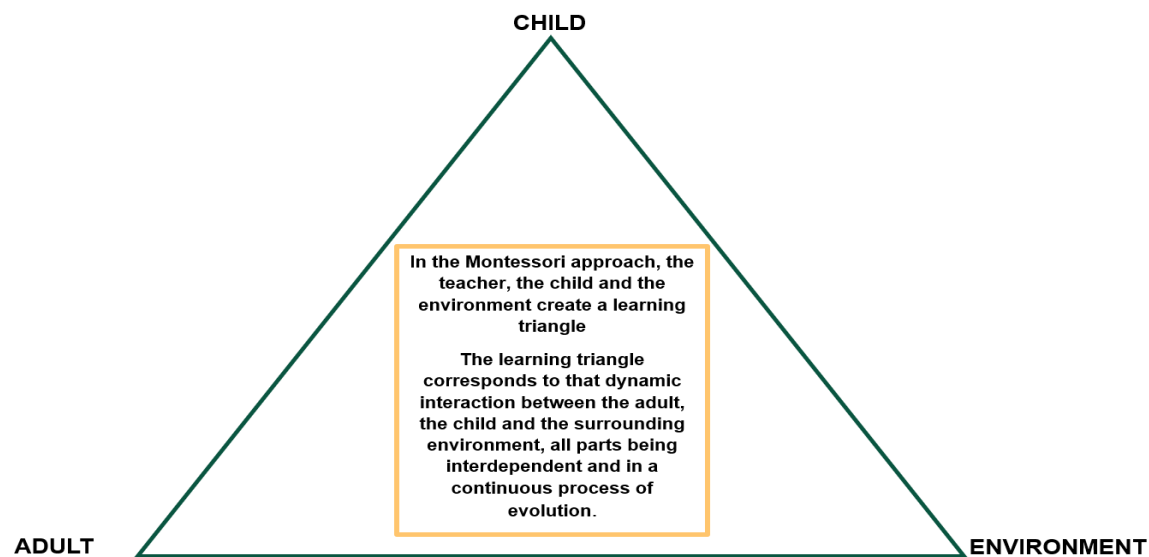
Setting type: Offers two types of provision: Term time and All year nursery

Facility type: Refurbished from other use

Ownership of the Setting: Privately owned

Date Setting opened: 2007

Date and grade of last Ofsted / relevant national inspection: June 2022 / Outstanding



The accreditation criteria draw on the principles of the dynamic learning triangle, which is at the core of the Montessori philosophy and approach.

The adult, the child and the environment create the learning triangle, with dynamic interaction and interdependence between all three parts. These dynamics in effective practice enable continued improvement of quality. This triangle underpins all documentation for reflection and assessment in the CM Quality Assurance Programme.

This report is based on the information submitted by the setting (including its self-evaluation) and on the evidence gathered during the Assessor's visit.

The Child

Attendance on the day of the accreditation visit:

| Age | How many children were present | | |
|--------|--------------------------------|-------------------|---------|
| | Morning session | Afternoon session | All day |
| 0 – 2 | - | - | 7 |
| 2 – 3 | - | - | 6 |
| 3 – 5 | - | - | 20 |
| Over 5 | - | - | 0 |

Summary of evidence and assessment of practice:

At Westwood Montessori (WM) children look happy, comfortable and engaged with the world around them. There is a sense of purpose and ease in the way children move, play and interact with the environment and people. They are confident in choosing an activity and ready to join in daily tasks that they understand are needed and are important for the wellbeing of all. They embrace the opportunities for learning in all areas of the curriculum that meet their interests; they contribute to conversations, learn from collaborating with others and act with enthusiasm and fun. The positive and loving atmosphere is reflected in the children's relaxed demeanour as they feel a deep sense of belonging and that they are valued for their individual qualities. Children take responsibilities for and show a positive sense of themselves as they contribute to the wellbeing of the community and to the care of the environment.

Independence

Children are seen as capable and are supported in developing and refining the skills they need to carry out the many activities of daily living and routines.

Babies and toddlers are independent as they move around their room, making decisions about where to go and what object to explore that attracts their attention, pacing themselves through every activity and routine during the day. As they wake up from their nap, they leave their little beds and walk sleepily and relaxed into the room. At snack time they help themselves to fruit from the serving plate, they pour water in their cup and are autonomous as they eat and drink. Staff are encouraged to be mindful of the time toddlers need to wait for the serving plate to arrive at the table.

The older children in the preschool room are confident and independent in their self-care routines and in using the toilet; they also move freely between the indoor and outdoor areas, change shoes and put on and take off the all-weather overalls. At snack and lunch they can help in the preparation of their food and help themselves at the table. Their independence is exercised, celebrated, and fostered during the work cycle and during all routines and events of the day.

Socialisation

At WM, interactions with others are one of the golden threads woven through the day. Social etiquette, Grace and Courtesy together with the Golden Rules provide children with clear, simple ground rules and consistent boundaries, within which they can truly enjoy the freedoms allowed by the environment. Teachers at WM are ready to support children in understanding their own and others' emotions: children develop their capacity to express how they feel, to regulate and how to communicate to understand and resolve conflicts.

In all environments, indoor classrooms and outdoor gardens, children can be seen and heard as they spontaneously join in a small group engrossed in an art and craft activity, as they explore sensorial materials, discuss a story and negotiate on how to prepare the kitchen section for tea. In pairs, they choose an activity they are interested in, showing each other how, for example, to grade the broad stair, and give each other space and time to carry out what they have in mind. Vertical grouping gives the opportunity to continually learn from each other and develop their play. From their section of the garden, toddlers can observe and listen to what older children are doing and spontaneous interactions occur. Children transitioning to the older classroom spend part of the afternoon there, accompanied and supported by the presence of their key person: they explore the new environment, become familiar with the structure of the room and begin to interact with their future peers.

Exploration

At WM, children are free to access an environment that is well prepared and rich in resources and opportunities to explore. They have access to resources and activities that are interesting and inviting and that promote creative and critical thinking while stimulating their curiosity. Children are active as they explore, find out, solve problems, take responsibilities, look after themselves, the other children and the environment. During the day of the accreditation visit, children experienced and discussed physical and chemical changes as they made salt dough: *“The dough is getting dry...we can add water”* and *“You need to do a lot of work to make it a soft ball...”* Children built with sensorial materials, examined and learned about grading long rods and they made new creations as they cut and glued cardboard segments. They explored and correlated speed and distance as they chased each other running and riding their tricycles, they experienced and discussed mud and all its qualities.

Movement

Practice at WM and its integrated Forest School sessions ensure that children are free to move using their whole bodies and to feel and discover the world around using their senses. They develop motor skills such as coordination, balance, awareness of their own body and integrate them within the physical space and in relation to others. All areas of the environment and all activities respond to and promote the children’s need to move, in accordance with their curiosity, need to explore, need to be actively involved in the world around them and to develop the skills for independence and autonomy. In the nursery room and garden, babies and toddlers refine their gross motor movement as they crawl, stand, crouch, sit down and walk. Low cruising shelves support the development of their fine motor skills as they grasp, hold, drop and transport the items they find in trays, in baskets and in the browsing boxes.

The older children continue to develop and refine more complex large and fine motor skills. Indoors and outdoors, they use their body as they play, carry trays and boxes when they prepare lunch, as they work outside to clean the guinea pigs’ enclosures (they sweep, lay out wood chips and straw), they wash boots, or create shopping lists, draw and write, count items in the ‘pretend shop’ and use tools for art and craft creations. Children participate in regular sessions of drama, music and movement and singing.

It is evident by observing all children at WM, how much they love to move, learn to move, and move to learn.

Communication

Children at WM are spontaneous and ready to interact with others and to communicate. They use different modes of representing the world, of expressing ideas and emotional states, of narrating events and telling stories, planning and creating, examining problems and working out solutions. Their involvement, their effort in what they do and how they share with others are celebrated. Children feel supported and valued. They show confidence and are open to knowing others. On the day of the accreditation visit, they initiated conversation with the assessor: *“What is your name? My name is...”*; *“Do you like my green glasses, they are not real glasses, can you see there are no lenses?”*; *“Hi, do you like my costume? My mummy made it!”* During the visit, in the afternoon, three children played chasing, with much dialogue about the rules of the game. Teachers are role models as they are interested and ready to listen to each child, extending vocabulary and recasting sentence structure during these exchanges, so meaningful to the child.

The Environment

Summary of evidence and assessment of practice:

WM offers a friendly, loving environment that is beautifully prepared and appealing; it is rich in resources that are well organised in all the different areas of the curriculum and has a warm, fun-loving, flexible, and relaxed atmosphere. The indoor rooms, the outdoor gardens, the natural world with the farm activities, fields, and meadows and the close-by forest offer children seamless opportunities for growing, developing and learning about themselves and the world. Children are encouraged to develop and apply their thinking and creative skills, their emotional awareness and self-regulation; they develop care and empathy for others, take responsibility and help others, and look after and protect their environment and its resources.

Order

Children’s need for order is addressed in the environment. Physical order is in the layout of the rooms and of the garden and in the organised equipment on the shelves. It is also applied in the meaningful and appropriate routines that help children to orient themselves, in space and time, to make their choices, to be active, to build positive relationships, to cope well and manage the micro transitions of the day. The work cycle and the cycle of activity help children to choose and to learn, to work according to their inner energies, needs and abilities, to feel respected and to respect other children and adults.

The activities

The environment at WM is rich in educational provision. The activities and materials are complete, visually appealing, well presented on shelves and in the designated places where they are put back ready to be used again. In all Montessori curriculum areas the activities available are ordered in a logical way that supports spontaneous curiosity and progression of learning, so that earlier skills and knowledge provide a sound base for children's new lines of learning. Many activities are designed by teachers to extend children's experience and experimentation, to respond to children's individual interests and needs.

The physical environment

Indoors

WM is a large farm building fully refurbished for the purpose of being a functional and comfortable Montessori Early Years setting. The main door opens to a welcoming entrance hall, where parents can find Montessori activities they can borrow and take home. The entrance hall leads to a well-proportioned office, to the nursery room - 'the nest' for children from 6 months to two years - and the preschool room for children aged two to five years. A short well-lit corridor sees doors to the main kitchen where all meals are freshly prepared every day, and to the restrooms. Low level windows allow the view between corridor and kitchen on one side and the nursery classroom on the other: this main layout contributes to the sense of openness and positive energy flowing between spaces and people that work in and visit the setting.

Both the nursery and preschool rooms are well proportioned, spacious, with plenty of natural light and with direct access to their gardens.

Outdoors

The designated gardens have interest tables and activities that offer variations and extensions in all areas of learning. In a different section, activities on the shelves include reading books, drawing and colouring, sensorial activities to refine perception of colour and shape in nature. In the preschool garden, tricycles are parked in numbered slots. On the day of the accreditation visit, a child showed the assessor the containers where they had planted seeds and, later on, another child explained the related guiding cards and book: *"We know the new flower shoots, here are the daffodils"*.

The nearby shelves house all children's boots together with a washing station to wash the mud off and benches to support their independent changing of clothes. The larger part of the garden is a green lawn, with small trees near the fenced boundaries, and fix provision made of natural and upcycled material: the mud kitchen, a small hill leading to a bridge, a train made out of logs and half-tyres emerging from the soil create a wonderful area for adventure and role play. There is a sitting area, with a small table and chairs, and separate gardening activities and for taking care of pets.

Firsthand experiences and active learning

All activities are designed so that children have concrete, physical and operative experiences: the indoor resources and the complementary activities in the outdoors are integrated and extended to scaffold every child's personal and unique holistic development.

The Adult

Adults present during the accreditation visit.

AYR = All Year Round

TT= Term Time

| Role and responsibilities | Qualifications | Length of time at the setting | Part time* | Full time* |
|--|--|-------------------------------|----------------------------------|------------|
| MW- School principal SEND Coordinator Designated Safeguarding Officer FS Leader, Outdoor Forest Aid | Montessori Dip.-Level 4, Cert in EY Practice, BA(Hons) Early Years Advanced Montessori Dip, EYP, Masters Early Childhood, EdD | 15 Y | Time shared amongst all settings | |

| | | | | |
|---|---|-------|----------|----------|
| KL - Setting Manager & Montessori Lead Practitioner | Montessori L4 Diploma EYE BA (Hons) Montessori Early Childhood Studies | 7m | | x AYR |
| DB - Deputy Manager | BA Hons Early Childhood Studies, MIP | 2Y 4m | x AYR | |
| LV - Deputy Manager & Nursery Room Leader | Montessori Diploma L4 | 13Y | | x TT |
| AW - Early Years Practitioner | NVQ L2 Diploma in Playwork | 6Y | | x TT |
| AT- Early Years Practitioner | BA Hons History, PGCE in Primary Education, QTS RP 00/48176 | 3Y 2m | x TT | |
| CO- Early Years Practitioner | BA Hons Early Childhood Studies, MIP | 2Y 4m | | x AYR |
| EC – Early Years Practitioner | L2 TQUK Diploma in Early Years | | | x AYR |
| FM – Early Years Practitioner | BA Hons Geography, QTS 03/42640, Montessori in Practice | | x TT | |
| GS- Early Years Practitioner | Montessori Diploma L3 | 12Y | | x AYR |
| JH – Early Years Practitioner | Working towards EYE Level 4 Montessori Dip. | 11 m | x AYR | |
| OB – early Years Practitioner SENDCO | BA Business and Management, EYE L4 Montessori | 2Y | | x AYR |
| MF – Early Years Practitioner | EYE L3 Montessori Diploma | 1Y 4m | | x AYR |
| AW – Early Years Practitioner | Working towards EYE Level 4 Montessori Dip. | 5m | | x AYR |

Summary of evidence and assessment of practice:

The teachers create continuous provision to meet children's needs and interests, engage with children as loving guides, companions and role-models. Teachers prepare an environment that always welcomes children's wish to interact and learn. They support children in becoming independent and self-confident, in making friends, in understanding people's ideas and feelings and be empathic and helpful. Teachers adhere to the Montessori values of respecting and following the inner spontaneous activity of the developing child. They recognise the centrality of parents, families and important people in children's lives and promote a full and trusting collaboration between school and family. Teachers create a strong sense of belonging for both children and their families; they promote the principles of Cosmic Education, including sustainability and protection and use of the world's resources by offering all stakeholders opportunities to contribute to the community through a growing sense of responsibility.

The Leadership Team

The owner and principal of the school has been for years the inspiring heart of WM and the academic force of the organisation that provides Montessori training and consultancy. The principal, the manager and the deputy managers are the members of the leadership team (LT) who also work in the classrooms *"to role-model and support the team and to be aware, also through classroom observations, of the qualities and the needs of the teaching team and the children."* The LT recognises the importance of creating and maintaining *"...an atmosphere of trust, mutual professional and personal respect, celebration of individual strength and talents, and wish to help each other, that is indispensable to creating an environment where all children and adults thrive."* This is witnessed and experienced during the assessment visit.

Supervision meetings with every member of the teaching staff on a termly basis create a dynamic positive cycle of collaboration and guidance and is a celebration of everyone's good practice and professional commitment; continuing professional development responds to the staff's interests and needs.

The LT coordinates communication with parents, making sure that information is *"...as accessible as possible using an online system, daily dialogue, written information displayed at the door, email and telephone calls."*

The Teaching Team

Most teachers hold a Montessori qualification and support and mentor the colleagues who are currently studying and training in Early Years and Montessori Education. They observe and are skilful in 'planning in the moment', recognising spontaneous

occasions for extending the learning experience, considering possible paths of development. During the visit, it was observed that teachers were able to either support or withdraw as to not interfere with the children's involvement, motivation and enjoyment in what they did and achieved. They work with the SEND coordinator, to address and meet every child's individual needs, collaborating with families and with external services and specialists to create a well-integrated and individualised programme for the child.

The teachers share with colleagues their knowledge of children's progress and of what they have observed. Everyone is trusted and is independent in designing and introducing new activities in the environment that address children's individual needs; day by day, they communicate efficiently, sharing new lesson plans, and how materials have been organised on shelves. Teachers carry out peer-on-peer observations, celebrating and discussing good practice, being each other's "critical friends".

The Key Person

At WM, the key person approach is applied. Children have a dedicated key teacher, a warm, available, affectionate and capable adult with whom they form a positive attachment and who becomes their emotional safe base.

The key person promotes and nurtures a positive partnership with parents, seen as central to the life, wellbeing and development of their children. From early on, the key person and the parents meet informally, followed by a formal meeting to share how they see the child move through the transition between home and the new environment and community, establishing a first benchmark for their continued collaboration during the whole time the child attends the setting. The key person shares with parents the observations, assessments and activities planned for the children and parents can add their observations and comments too. Together, they share and celebrate with the children their own unique significant experiences and milestones; they construct with the children an account of their experiences and personal achievement that contributes to children' sense of who they are, as they grow and change. In one parent's words: *"Teachers are all so kind, compassionate and have such expertise in nurturing and educating the children"*.

Commendations

- The beautiful environment provides children with constant access to the outdoors, with continued opportunities for first-hand experiences in nature, to care for plants and animals and to witness first-hand the importance of nature's resources and how they, as humans, can affect the environment.
- The leadership and teaching teams, together with the families at WM, nurture the children's sense of belonging within the physical and spiritual environment; as deep relationships develop between the children themselves and with their loving teachers, the developing feeling of community is strong. Parents acknowledge *"...the lovely atmosphere, highly qualified staff, with a very kind and caring manner"*.
- The setting is committed to the training of students and new teachers; mentors support all staff to understand and apply the Montessori philosophy in their daily practice. The leadership team provides staff with an environment where they can feel free to explore, expand their personal and professional horizons and to thrive.

Recommendations

- In the nursery room, during snack time, introduce the identified small changes to shorten the waiting time for children to serve themselves so that this daily routine is more manageable and expectations more appropriate to their age.
- Having been recently through a period of considerable change in management, continue to create and maintain a positive system of collaboration and communication, while implementing the changes you have started to identify to keep the scheduling of meetings efficient and manageable for all involved.
- Continue to develop CPD workshops and a more efficient framework for reflective practice and skills development for all mentor-mentee pairs/small groups.

- Continue to develop old connections and to establish new ones with families, other schools and local communities in the neighbourhood, to promote cosmic education principles, including sustainable use of natural resources, recycling and upcycling of man-made material and articles.

Conditions

The Accreditation Assessor has concluded that the setting meets CM main requirements for Accreditation and therefore no conditions are set.

Name of Assessor: Antonella Cirillo

Date of Report: 7th April 2024

The CM Accreditation Report has been reviewed by the CM Accreditation Board. The Board has verified the Assessor's recommendation to accredit the Setting.

Award

**Accreditation is therefore granted
to:**

Westwood Montessori

Validity period:

From: April 2024

to: April 2027

Receiving accreditation carries the expectation that the setting will continue to implement the Commendations, develop on the Recommendations and fulfil the Conditions (if applicable) highlighted in this Accreditation Report to continue to strive for best Montessori practice.

The report does not directly address the standards of practice that are the responsibility of the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted).

The report does not provide any assessment of financial aspects of the setting.