

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.

Children's House Montessori

Birling Village Hall, Snodland Road, Birling, Kent ME19 5JG

Dates of previous MEAB accreditations: November 2012 and November 2015

This accreditation is valid until December 2022

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

Description of the nursery:

Children's House Montessori was established in 1998 and has been registered under its current owner, the Head, since 2015. The nursery is set in Birling Village Hall and serves both the local community and that of the surrounding rural area. The pack-away nursery has one open plan classroom, kitchen and toilet facilities and direct access to a large outdoor play area. In addition, it makes use of the village's play area and the nearby open countryside. It has exclusive use of the premises during its opening hours and has a large, lockable storage room which enables all of the resources and children's records to be stored securely when packed away.

The 26-place nursery caters for children from 2 to 5 years old. It opens during term

times, Monday to Thursday 09.30 to 15.30 and Friday 09.30 to 12.30. On the day of the second reaccreditation visit there were 22 children on the register; nine attended in the morning and eight in the afternoon, with three staff members present during the morning and afternoon. No children currently attend for afternoons only. The children who stay for the afternoon bring in a packed lunch. The nursery offers children a range of additional activities including French, yoga, music, phonics, cooking and Forest School. It also offers a Parent/Toddler group fortnightly on a Friday afternoon – this is not being assessed as part of the reaccreditation.

The Head works full-time and employs four regular members of staff who work a range of full- and part-time hours. She also employs a further two cover staff to provide continuity of care for the children in the absence of staff members. The Head holds Montessori qualifications which cover the ages from birth to 11 years. Of her team, three are Montessori qualified, with one additionally holding a Montessori primary qualification. The other regular member of staff is currently completing a Montessori diploma, and a Montessori teaching practice student also attends regularly. Both cover staff hold Qualified Teacher Status. A deputy manager covers for the Head if she is absent. Staff members are trained and experienced in working with children who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and those with English as an additional language. The nursery accesses advice and training support from the local authority.

Summary

Children's House Montessori is successfully led by the highly dedicated and inspirational Head. Since its previous MEAB accreditation there has been a transfer of ownership to the Head, who worked at the setting before the transfer and who has introduced many changes to continue to develop the ethos and success of the nursery. The new Head is exceptionally passionate about creating a nurturing and enriching learning environment that follows the principles of the Montessori philosophy. In addition to this, she is a strong advocate of being an accredited Unicef Rights Respecting School, a scheme that aims to empower children to understand and communicate their rights and to have strong aspirations in life.

The Head is fully supported by an experienced and committed team; together they bring a wealth of attributes in providing a rich and exciting range of learning experiences. All staff members have high expectations of children and are closely attuned to each individual child's interests and development. Adults and children build trusting and respectful relationships, which creates a nursery where children are confident and independent learners with extremely high self-esteem and a positive approach towards learning.

Partnership with parents is outstanding. Parents are regularly invited in to help with activities and Forest School. The Head runs many courses including Empowered Parenting courses and parents also frequently attend other relevant training organised by the setting. These opportunities create mutual understanding and help ensure high levels of consistency in practice for the children.

As recommended at the nursery's previous MEAB accreditation, the team has reviewed the written aims and policies to ensure the Montessori principles are now fully embedded in them. In addition, positive steps have been taken to ensure that there are now strong links made in the children's progress records between the Montessori curriculum and the developmental stages identified by the Early Years Foundation Stage Framework.

As part of the first reaccreditation visit, it was recommended that the team should review the length of group activities at the end of the sessions, to ensure that children remain fully engaged and have optimum opportunities to make independent choices about their learning for the entire length of the session. Some positive changes were seen in relation to this at the second visit. Although these changes are working well, it is further recommended that the length of the adult-led group activities continues to be reviewed, to further reduce the time the children are expected to sit for.

During the first reaccreditation visit it was also recommended that the team continues to support the non-Montessori qualified members of staff to further consolidate their understanding of the Montessori approach and secure the philosophy into all staff members' daily practice. At the second visit, all members of the regular staff team were Montessori qualified or completing a Montessori teaching diploma and therefore the Montessori ethos and approach was implemented at a consistently high level.

The extremely exciting and stimulating 'free flow' learning environment allows children to freely decide whether to work indoors or outdoors during the sessions. Both areas have an extensive range of high-quality Montessori materials and beautifully crafted and interesting non-Montessori activities to foster children's passion for learning and discovery. It is recommended that the team continues to review how some of the materials on the indoor shelves are displayed, as some parts of the classroom are a little cluttered, making it more difficult for children to find and return activities to the shelf with full autonomy.

The children at Children's House Montessori are fully nurtured and encouraged to become inquisitive and competent learners. They have excellent opportunities to learn about the world around them and develop strong bonds with their teachers and peers. The atmosphere created is extremely respectful and children are expertly encouraged to enjoy a breadth of experiences that fosters their personal, social and emotional development and ability to flourish.

The setting provides an education which follows the principles of the Montessori approach and environment. The setting has successfully addressed 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:

- continue to review the length of the adult-led group activities at the end of the sessions to ensure that all children remain fully engaged; reducing this will also help to extend the Montessori work cycle and create optimal opportunities for children to make independent choices about their learning for the entirety of the session; and
- continue to review how the Montessori materials and other learning resources are organised on the shelves, with adequate spacing. This will help to support children's developing sense of order and ability to access the resources more independently.

An Action Plan has been drawn up with, and retained by, the setting to address these recommendations.

Philosophy:

Children's House Montessori places strong emphasis on delivering an approach that values and develops the 'whole child' to ensure that each child works towards their potential. Staff members skillfully support children to learn at their own pace and to make excellent progress through the different areas of learning, based on their interests. Opportunities for children across the age range to learn from each other are successfully provided as they happily share and work harmoniously together in their spacious classroom. Staff members seek to nurture children's emotional wellbeing and to empower them to be active participants in decision-making; for example, children vote on which group activities they wish to have and they now have a pet snake called 'Lucky', as they voted that this was the pet they wanted. As recommended at the previous MEAB accreditation, the Montessori principles are now successfully interwoven into the nursery's classroom displays, documentation and on its website, which helps parents gain a deeper understanding of the nursery's ethos. The Montessori philosophy is clearly central to staff's practice at Children's House Montessori.

Learning and Development:

This skilled and experienced team is excellent at motivating children and guiding their learning. Teaching is consistently high quality, and some is inspirational. On the day of the first reaccreditation visit children showed impressive knowledge about the world when participating in a 'Birthday Walk'. They confidently talked about the passage of time and the changing seasons, and how the earth moves around the sun. They also showed good understanding of the wider universe when exploring 'Cosmic Nesting Boxes', which teach them about the solar system, planet Earth, continents, countries and the place where they live.

Children's imagination, language development and physical skills are also promoted and challenged exceptionally well. During the first visit they delighted in building a house with large bricks in the sandpit and were expertly supported by a teacher to retell the story of 'The Three Little Pigs', using lots of descriptive language and showing deep levels of

involvement. Children's sensory development was also encouraged as they engaged in role-play in the mud kitchen, using a variety of herbs and spices.

During the afternoon the children enjoyed making hanging pine cone decorations and clay faces with stones and leaves at the Forest School session. They immensely enjoyed running through the trees and exploring insects and plants. During the walk to the woodland, children were encouraged to listen to running streams and birds. The teachers are exceptional at inspiring a love and appreciation of nature. During the second visit the children displayed lots of excitement and interest as they celebrated the school dog's birthday. 'Izzie the dog' belongs to the Head and regularly visits the children, which has been warmly welcomed by the children and parents. The children delighted in hearing about when she was born and enjoyed feeding her carrots as a treat.

During the second visit children's mathematical knowledge, thinking skills and creativity were extremely well supported whilst they enjoyed making play dough. The children independently identified the different ingredients and discussed the process of making it. They also displayed high levels of motivation when sweeping autumn leaves and watering plants in the garden. As the children participated in these outdoor activities their understanding of the changes in seasons were supported exceptionally well by the adults.

Each child's achievements and progress are now effectively recorded in their Learning Journals and the team uses different observation methods and tracking systems to ensure thorough knowledge of the child's progress in all areas of their development. Staff members know the children extremely well and are excellent at involving parents in their children's learning. Children's opportunities to learn and develop are exceptional.

Prepared Environment: resources and materials

Children fully enjoy exploring an extensive range of Montessori materials and other interesting resources in this beautifully prepared environment, both indoors and outside. Each area of the curriculum is well equipped with a variety of age-appropriate and interesting activities. To improve the environment even further, it is recommended that the team continues to review the way in which some of the learning resources are displayed, to ensure that each set of resources has adequate space on the shelves. This will further support children in accessing the materials independently.

The atmosphere created at Children's House Montessori is calm and productive as children fully engage in a good balance of self-initiated learning and adult-supported activities. Children enjoy sitting at a 'peace table' to express their feelings and make wishes on a 'wishing tree'. They are effectively supported to learn about the classroom ground rules and the importance of kindness. They enjoy joining a group at the end of the session where they have a chance to 'rest their minds'. The prepared environment is excellent for supporting children's holistic development.

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

Children are provided with very good opportunities to make independent choices. They are given lots of responsibility and take turns to have different helping roles in the classroom. Children wear badges to remind them of their roles. This promotes high levels of respect and self-esteem. During both reaccreditation visits, children enjoyed peeling and cutting vegetables for snack and chose when to eat, as snack is available throughout the work cycle. Children also enjoy hanging up washed clothes and setting the table for lunch.

Following the first visit some subtle changes have been made to improve the end of the sessions. The children are no longer required to sit and listen to a teacher in an organised group activity for such long periods of time. Furthermore, the children who go home for lunch have the opportunity to continue to freely explore resources together as they wait to be collected. These positive changes have extended the length of the work cycle and provided more opportunity for free choice throughout the day. Moving forward, it is recommended that these arrangements continue to be reviewed in order to reduce the length of the adult-led group activity even further, particularly to consider the needs of the younger members of the classroom community.

Montessori Practice: links with parents, including reports and records

Links with parents are exceptional. Staff members make sure that parents receive daily feedback and parents are fully welcomed to stay in the classroom. The setting uses an interactive online app to share information securely about events and children's learning. This is an excellent way of ensuring that two-way communication is achieved, and that children's learning can be fully supported at home. Written information is also effectively exchanged and news of activities and events at home are shared by the child with their peers during group times.

There are regular open days and evenings where parents can gain a deeper understanding about the Montessori philosophy and activities in the classroom. Parents are also invited to termly progress meetings where they can view their child's Learning Journals and talk about their development and next steps with the key person and other staff. They attend special events and celebrations, and some have visited to talk about their occupations. Children enjoy taking activity bags home, such as for messy play and fine motor skill activities to enjoy with their parents. In addition, parents frequently attend training opportunities organised by the setting and this helps to ensure that a consistent approach and shared vision for children's learning is achieved.

Staff: qualifications, deployment, and performance management

The team members have a wealth of experience and show high levels of commitment and enjoyment in their work. They are successful in their self-reflective practice and there is an incisive development plan in place to help them continue to enhance all

aspects of the nursery. Staff meetings and one to one supervisory meetings take place every month to discuss practice and continuing professional development. These are well documented. Joint observations on the quality of teaching are also carried out and evaluated regularly. All new staff members benefit from a detailed induction when they join.

At the first reaccreditation visit it was recommended that the Montessori approach be further embedded into the entire team's practice and, in particular, that the non-Montessori qualified teachers have more opportunities to engage in continuing professional development to secure their understanding of the Montessori philosophy. On the day of the second visit, this recommendation had been fully addressed as all permanent staff members now hold a Montessori qualification or are engaging in Montessori training. This consistency was strongly reflected during the visit in the teachers' practice and their interactions with the children.

The Head organises regular professional development days for the region's Montessori community, to which parents are also invited. On the day of the first visit, parents presented the teaching team with some new Montessori materials for the classroom, a canvas with photographs and handprints of their children and with a plaque that states, 'Thank you for giving us wings to fly and a safe place to land'. This statement encapsulates the love of learning that the teachers inspire in children and the high levels of appreciation the parents have for the Head and her team.

Name of Assessor: Amy Mckenzie

Date of first visit: 14th June 2018

Date of second visit: 8th October 2018

Date report submitted: First visit – 17th June 2018

Second visit – 10th October 2018