



# **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.

### **Maynard Montessori Pre-school**

School House, The High Street, Stebbing, Essex CM6 3SH

Date of previous MEAB accreditation: June 2012

Date of first re-accreditation visit: 5 May 2015

Date of second re-accreditation visit: 19 October 2015

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

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

Maynard Montessori Pre-school is located in the grounds of Stebbing Primary School in the village of Stebbing, Essex. This pre-school is run as a charity; it was registered in 2009 and is one of a group of five Montessori early years settings.

The purpose-built premises consist of one classroom with a reception area, a carpeted area, and a solid floor and kitchen area. There is also a separate staff kitchen, toilet facilities and office. The classroom contains a number of storage cupboards. There is a newly developed outside area for the nursery children: they are also able to use the main playgrounds when the primary school children are not there, including the 'Forest School' area on the site.

The pre-school is open during term times from Monday to Friday and has morning and afternoon sessions, with some children staying all day. The morning session runs from 08.50 to 13.00 and the afternoon from 12.15 to 14.45, with an overlap for lunch and the arrival of children for the afternoon session. There are currently 42 children aged between 2 and 5 years enrolled. On the day of the second re-accreditation visit 14



children attended in the morning and seven stayed for the afternoon, with one joining just for the afternoon. Six members of staff worked in the morning and four in the afternoon.

The principal runs all five pre-schools with a board of trustees. She is in regular attendance (but is not included in the staff rota). The day to day running of the pre-school is organised by the manager who works full time. The principal holds a full Montessori diploma and has a degree in Childhood and Youth Studies and Early Years Professional Status (EYPS). Including the manager, there are nine members of staff; two work full time and the appointed deputy is in charge if the manager is absent. Five of the team are Montessori qualified, one is studying for a Montessori diploma and the remaining members of staff have other suitable early years qualifications.

The pre-school makes provision for children with special 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. The children that stay all day can bring their own lunch from home or have a cooked meal which is prepared at the adjacent school.

## Summary

Children at Maynard Montessori are cared for in an extremely welcoming and child-centered environment, which ensures that they are nurtured and happy. Exemplary practice across the pre-school ensures that staff promote all aspects of the children's learning and development. The provision for inclusive practice is very good and the unique qualities of every child are highly valued and respected. The partnership with parents is strong and ensures that positive, trusting relationships are developed, which in turn supports the very good progress that the children make. The web-site is full of information and links for parents to access, which helps them to reinforce the Montessori ethos at home

The staff enthusiastically incorporated all the recommendations from the first re-accreditation visit. They removed some of the tables, the younger children now have more space to work on the floor, and staff have also provided the children with a variety of interesting and varied treasure basket materials. These changes have been particularly beneficial for the younger children. Nature in the classroom has been consolidated into one area which is now well resourced and the children are able to contribute relevant artifacts so that the nature table is now a dynamic part of their environment.

Comprehensive self-evaluation methods are used to ensure that staff members frequently review their practice and improvements are continually made; the pre-school's decision to apply for MEAB re-accreditation is testament to this commitment. The team works hard to maintain high standards and there were no recommendations made at the previous MEAB accreditation.



***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:**

This is a strong area for the pre-school. Parents are provided with excellent access to information about the Montessori philosophy through the informative website, the web-based record keeping system and open mornings, as well as through paper-based written information. The setting's handbook describes in detail its aims and aspirations, along with the planning for the year. The pre-school operates an 'open door policy' which is very much in evidence and parents spoken to during the re-accreditation visits said that they appreciate all the information they receive about the progress their children make in their learning and development at the nursery. The principles, goals and philosophy are regularly reviewed, recorded and available for the parents to read.

Staff support self-initiated learning and are able to 'follow the child', guided by their comprehensive knowledge of the Montessori method. The holistic approach of the teachers supports the development of each child and this is promoted further by staff planning separately for each of them.

The adults work extremely well as a team and provide an environment that is rich in resources and enticing for the children to work and play in. As a result the children enjoy their time at the nursery and remain engaged in activities suitable for their age and stage of development for sustained periods of time.

### **Learning and Development:**

The managers of all the five settings meet regularly to discuss planning, which covers all seven learning areas of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) Framework and the Montessori curriculum. Some of the staff in this pre-school also share their expertise across the group, such as in the areas of art and special needs provision. Long term planning is based on the Montessori curriculum and reflects the individual needs of the children. One of the outstanding features of this pre-school is the way the staff adapt their planning in response to spontaneous learning opportunities. For example, a toad came into their garden and the staff took the opportunity to use this to teach the children about amphibians. This project was developed in the classroom with related activities.



The parents take an active role and are involved with their children's planning and recording of their progress from the moment they start at the nursery. With the help of the secure web-based system and written observations, planning for each child is very comprehensive and combines effectively the EYFS areas of learning with the Montessori curriculum both on paper and digitally. Through their observations the staff are able to monitor and record the children's progress, which is mapped to the EYFS. There is ample time for the children to work uninterrupted in the morning as the work cycle is three hours long and any extra activities such as cooking and yoga are incorporated into the session. The afternoon is shorter and depends on how long the children take to eat their lunch.

By providing a diverse range of activities and enabling the children to move easily between the classroom and the outside area whatever the weather, staff help ensure that the children become motivated and independent learners. The majority of learning that takes place is child-initiated and staff deployment is very effective. Each member of the team is given an area of the environment to look after and they are adept at encouraging the children to access the extensive curriculum and interact freely with the adults.

The adjacent primary school is very hospitable and offers some of its facilities for the pre-school to use. The children are able to attend some school assemblies and special occasions. The school also allows the pre-school to use its sensory room by appointment. This facility, combined with the dedication and enthusiasm of the SENCo at the pre-school, provides children who have specific learning difficulties with an exceptional learning opportunity. The staff very capably support children with special educational needs and engage with their parents and with outside agencies as necessary. One of the outstanding features of this pre-school is the way that children with special educational needs are integrated with their peers. The setting has been recently presented with a bronze award for supporting children with autism from 'Good Beginnings'.

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

This outstanding, purpose-built environment is very light and welcoming. The different areas of learning are clearly defined. There are designated areas for snack, role play and block building as well as a very well-resourced art area. There is a 'cosy corner' with soft toys and cushions and role play provision, such as a home corner.

The activities are changed regularly and are clean and age appropriate, ready for use, complete and attractive. In following recommendations made at the first re-accreditation visit, activities to support heuristic play have been provided for the children; these are popular, varied and imaginative. The staff members now encourage the children to use the floor space to work on more, and have provided chairs that are the correct height for the shorter children, so that their feet can touch the floor when sitting at the tables. These additions have been especially beneficial to the younger



children.

A very well resourced nature table has also been assembled. As well as collecting for and contributing items to it, the children can change the contents. The children use the materials enthusiastically and benefit from these natural resources and the sensory experience that they offer. Plants and fish enhance the cultural areas as well as a live bearded dragon that has pride of place in the nature area, with his own notice board relating information about him. The children are able to feed him locusts and rocket, and take him out of the tank to stroke. On the day of the first re-accreditation visit a group of children found his behaviour riveting and this interest was well supported by a member of staff.

The classroom has direct access to the outside, which has three distinct areas. One is paved, one is tarmac and one is covered in astroturf, providing a suitable area for the children to use all year round, whatever the weather. The covered, paved area has resources from each of the Montessori curriculum areas along with tables and chairs. There is also a sand pit, music shed, mud kitchen, slide and planting area, bikes and scooters and a hillock for the children to run up and down. The children are also able to access a nature area in the school's grounds that is sometimes used for Forest School by the primary school children. Both indoors and outdoors are exceptionally well resourced, well maintained and fully reflect the interests of the children.

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

There are many opportunities for the children to develop their independent learning at Maynard Montessori. From the moment they enter the pre-school they are encouraged to manage their own clothes and self-register. They are free to choose where they want to work as soon as they have registered. Some of the older children have written their own names for their trays. The children show a high level of respect for the prepared environment both inside and out and readily respond to the expectations of those who work with them. Staff deployment is excellent and they are able to follow the children and offer presentations of activities as and when they are needed, both inside and out, throughout the day.

Children work effectively in groups or individually, making friends and learning to respect each other by turn taking. The setting operates a 'rolling snack' which is available to the children as soon as they arrive. Children are encouraged to serve themselves and wash up their plates afterwards. The outside area was opened early in the work cycles during both the re-accreditation visits. Children are able to fetch their coats and put on their shoes successfully with very little adult support. Circle time at the end of the morning is voluntary and the children can choose whether they stay outside, prepare the tables for lunch or join the circle for music and a story; this freedom to choose ensures that transition to lunch is effective and smooth.



Lunch is a very lively and well organized affair. The children are responsible for laying the tables and cleaning up afterwards. After lunch one boy was vacuuming and another was washing the floor. These activities promote their gross motor skills as well as give the children a sense of pride in their surroundings.

Parents are very supportive and appreciate the setting's efforts to promote their children's independence and they endeavour to continue the good practice at home.

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

The work cycle is three hours long in the morning and up to two and a half hours in the afternoon, depending on how long the children take to finish their lunch. This gives the children plenty of time to work at their own pace throughout the day, either in the classroom or outside. The mixed age range works well as the older children are encouraged to help the younger ones. All the children are allocated a key person, who works on the days their key children attend. However, all the staff can work with any child. All members of staff are responsible for recording observations on the children either using the digital system or on paper. Observations are also made available for the parents to see on their confidential parent web-page, which they appreciate, and the parents' responses are valued. The key person system works very effectively and they are responsible for ensuring that both the children's digital and paper records are kept up to date. They are very caring and supportive and therefore the children are happy, calm and engaged.

The staff carry out daily checks. The children are also encouraged to risk-assess their environment and are given a red triangle to put next to anything that they perceive could be hazardous. On the day of the first re-accreditation visit a boy placed a red triangle next to a plug socket as this was an area that he considered could be a risk. Staff deployment is clearly defined and there is a list in the classroom of the team's roles and responsibilities, with their photographs. All staff make sure that the environment inside and out is prepared to a very high standard. Every teacher has responsibility for one area of the classroom, which ensures that all areas are carefully looked after. Activities are rotated depending on the children's needs and interests. Children who need to sleep can use the 'cosy corner', which is comfortable and separated from the rest of the classroom by a partition.

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

Partnership with parents is very strong. The parents are welcomed into the classroom every day and are recognized as the children's primary educators. They can stay to settle their children for as long as necessary. This open door policy is very effective because it is evident that the transition from home to pre-school runs smoothly. The management are creative in developing different methods of communication to ensure that all the parents are able to take an active role in their children's learning and



assessment. The manager and her team provide learning packs for the parents which contain varied activities that support their children's learning at home and 'Energy Bags' are provided for the parents to help them with activities to promote their child's physical movement.

Informative newsletters are distributed once a term and emails are sent as and when necessary. One to one parent meetings are offered to all parents and information notices are posted on the digital system. The notice boards and photo displays are also used effectively. The pre-school has recently introduced a 'school readiness leaflet' which informs parents about how to help prepare their children for transition to primary school.

Staff members make very good use of the web-based digital system and the paper records, which include summative assessments of the children and information from the parents. These records facilitate very effective two-way communication between staff and families. The system is used to generate the mandatory two year old progress check from the extensive observations written on the portable tablet, which the staff condense into a more manageable written document. Verbal communication is excellent and parents are encouraged to talk to their child's key person. Two parents discussion evenings are offered each year. The manager has devised a very successful method to ensure that the parents contribute feedback by providing them with a questionnaire at the end of these evenings. The web-based digital record keeping system is very much appreciated by the parents and this, together with daily verbal communication, means that they feel very well informed and up to date with their children's progress.

A document provided by the local authority is used as a report for the children's next school. Teachers from their designated primary school are encouraged to come and visit the children joining their school. The children who join the adjacent primary school are also able to attend activities there. These initiatives help ensure that the transition for the children leaving runs as smoothly as possible.

### **Staffing:**

This is a highly qualified team with a well-organized staffing structure. The principal has overall responsibility for the pre-school, but leaves the day to day running of the setting to her competent manager. The majority of the staff are Montessori trained or are in the process of being trained, and two – including the principal – have EYPS. There are many opportunities for continuous professional development (CPD) training, which regularly include safeguarding and first aid. The outcome of all training is shared amongst the team effectively and, when appropriate, changes are put into practice. Recently a member of staff attended a course on promoting physical development and has now introduced the successful 'Energy Bags' for families. The principal and the manager ensure that all staff are able to access training if they feel they need to. The wide-ranging opportunities this team has for CPD is one of the outstanding features of



Maynard Montessori and they can share training with the other four settings. The manager also makes excellent use of the individual skills of the staff working with her. This is particularly noticeable in the provision for art and for special needs.

The staff work very well together, they share information consistently and communication between them is very effective. Formal meetings are held monthly and minutes are written in a book kept in the office, but informal discussions also take place on a daily basis. The staff induction process is comprehensive and staff appraisals and supervision are regularly carried out.

The ethos of Maynard Montessori promotes happy and active children who are keen to learn and who are treated with respect and valued as individuals. The whole team is deeply committed to providing genuine Montessori practice and they regularly review their School Development Plan. Their decision to apply for MEAB re-accreditation is a further indication of the team's dedication to continuous improvement and to the provision of a high quality Montessori environment.

Name of Assessor: Charlotte White

Date report submitted: First visit – 10 May 2015  
Second visit – 20 October 2015