



# **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” (2008) and subsequent revisions. 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 Old School House, Tenterden**

Ashford Road, Tenterden, Kent TN30 6SR

Date of the first re-accreditation visit: 2 October 2014

Date of the second re-accreditation visit: 22 January 2015

Date of previous MEAB accreditation: December 2010

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

#### **Description of the school**

The Old School House was registered under the current, private ownership in 1997. The school is located in a rural area near Tenterden in Kent and operates from purpose-built premises that have three main classroom areas and a portable classroom building for babies and toddlers up to 18 months. In the main building there is a classroom for 18 months to 3 year olds which is divided in two, to separate the younger group, and there is a room for the older children. There are four secure outdoor play areas, which the children can access from their rooms. The school has sole use of its premises, which are in the grounds of a house owned by the principal, and it also has use of a large field, with play equipment. The nursery has pet rabbits and a tortoise, and the principal/owner keeps horses, sheep, pigs, goats, dogs and chickens on her property. There are also two offices and a staff kitchen. There are children’s lavatory areas at each end of the main building and separate staff facilities.

There are currently 123 children aged between 3 months and 4 years on roll. The majority of the children stay all day. On the day of the second re-accreditation visit 51 attended in the morning and 33 stayed for the afternoon, with one child joining them



just for the afternoon. Eight of those in attendance were in the baby unit. The school makes provision for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), as well as for children with English as an additional language (EAL). It liaises with external agencies such as the local authority and private therapists.

The principal has many years of Montessori teaching experience and has a degree as well as a Montessori teaching diploma. She attends full time and is responsible for the day to day running of the school. Two full time managers support her; one has recently gained Qualified Teacher Status, as well as having a Montessori teaching diploma and the other is also Montessori trained. There are a further 14 members of staff, who have a variety of appropriate early years' qualifications; six have a Montessori teaching diploma and another is working towards this qualification. Thirteen work full time (including the room leaders) and one works mornings only. On the day of the second visit there were 13 members of teaching staff present. Four members of staff work with the youngest group. The school also employs a full time cook.

The setting is open from Monday to Friday from 08.00 to 18.00 all year round, early education sessional care as an option during term times and a holiday club for children up to the age of eleven. Older children, aged five to nine, may also attend after their primary school day; however, this out-of-school and the holiday provision is not being considered for the purpose of this accreditation.

The children who stay all day can bring a packed lunch or have a cooked meal which is prepared on the premises. Breakfast, snacks and tea are also provided for the children.

### **Summary**

The Old School House provides an extremely welcoming and inclusive environment for all its children and their families. The purpose-built premises are light and airy and the children have access to a wide range of different animals to observe and care for. The well trained staff have excellent strategies in place to meet the needs of all the children, recognizing their uniqueness and supporting them so that no group or individual is disadvantaged. Children make exceptionally rapid progress in their learning and development and thorough attention is given to identifying their individual personalities. Planning and assessment systems are used effectively to support and enhance children's learning and development.

Children benefit from the excellent partnerships between staff, parents and other professionals involved in their care. Teamwork is one of the many strengths of this school and staff are aware of their responsibilities towards each other as well as to the children. Teaching staff work with all the children in their room and all are involved in these children's record keeping. This clearly helps them identify areas for continued progress and supports sustained improvement in the children's development; all staff take a keen interest in the children's welfare. The children's freedom of choice and independence are paramount and the accessible indoor and



outside environments facilitate this. The children have access to the outside areas during the mornings and afternoons.

Since the previous MEAB accreditation, staff now implement procedures for the review and development of team performance and they use digital record keeping to help ensure that the approach to learning remains consistent for the children between school and home. The staff worked on the recommendations from the first re-accreditation visit by reviewing the transition to lunch, extending the work cycle and by reflecting on their observations of each child more fully.

***The school provides an education which follows the principles of the Montessori approach and environment. The school has successfully addressed the 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 develop the system of peer observations, involving all the staff and incorporating the use of the environment;
- track closely which activities are being used by the children and to evaluate these observations; and
- consider displaying photographs of all the staff with their names and roles so that parents know who is responsible for each separate role.

### **Philosophy:**

The Old School House 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 school is to provide a holistic approach to learning, placing emphasis on cultivating independent and motivated children. Each child is treated as an individual, and by respecting the children's motivation and needs and having a balance between child-initiated and adult-led learning, the children make excellent progress in all areas of development. Following the first re-accreditation visit, while the majority of the children are grouped by age and there is no contact indoors between the children in the different classes, there is now a broader age range in the older children's room.

The school's aims and objectives are described on the website, where there is an explanation of the Montessori philosophy and how the school adheres to it. A leaflet is available to parents who do not have access to the website. Other literature and information about Montessori education and the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) is available to parents, as well as information sessions which provide an opportunity for parents to exchange information on their children's progress and the activities that they



are involved in at the setting.

Through regular formal meetings and good verbal communication between staff there are frequent opportunities for the team to review the implementation of the principles, goals and philosophy in each classroom and to ensure that they are consistent throughout the school. The management provides staff with opportunities for Montessori continuing professional development training.

### **Learning and Development:**

The children are placed according to their age in one of the three completely separate classrooms. Babies and toddlers have their own building, which is designed and equipped especially for them.

The learning programme for the whole school is organized around the Montessori curriculum, which is linked successfully with the EYFS framework. When children start at the nursery their parents and a member of staff complete a form on their children's development, enabling plans to be drawn up from the beginning. The two year progress check is also drawn up and completed with parental contribution. Secure records of the children are compiled and their parents contribute verbally to them.

Planning for topic work and the environment – both inside and out – is comprehensive and relevant. Each room is set up and plans separately for their children according to their interests and stages of development. Long term planning provides a broad overview for each main area of the setting. Medium and short term plans are prepared taking into account the individual needs of the children

For most of the day the children can be seen engrossed in their freely chosen activities, supported by skilled staff who extend their enjoyment and learning. The children are encouraged to take responsibility for their own decisions and have the opportunity to choose where they work, both inside and out, throughout the work cycle. Following the first re-accreditation visit, the length of the work cycle has been extended by over half an hour by no longer having a whole group circle. This has increased the amount of time the children have to work independently and, as a result, the children are more able to follow their own developmental needs and become confident in learning at their own pace.

The school provides a rich and dynamic learning environment for all the children, which embraces all areas of learning and development in the EYFS. These are reflected in the range of predominantly Montessori activities available to the children both inside and through the varied and extensive outdoor facilities. The excellent communication between staff and their effective management helps ensure that they all know their responsibilities regarding the learning environment.



The principal recognizes the importance of working co-operatively with other professionals involved in the care and development of the children. The staff are able to support children with learning difficulties and EAL, involving outside agencies when necessary.

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

The purpose-built school building is very light and welcoming. Three areas are set up in the main building to accommodate children of different ages. The babies and toddlers' temporary building in the garden is also bright and airy and well equipped with appropriate materials, with sensory play, a climbing area and a sleeping area, as well as child-sized tables and chairs. Good use is made of treasure baskets and even the very youngest children are encouraged to help put their activities away.

The classrooms that are used for children 18 months and older are very spacious and the areas of learning are clearly defined and prepared in accordance with the Montessori philosophy, with accessible shelving. The activities on the practical life shelves are changed to accommodate their current topic work. All classrooms have a sink and direct access to their own well equipped outside area.

Each outside area has an extensive variety of suitable equipment including a mud kitchen, giant sandpit, scooters and climbing equipment. There is also a field which children across the age range could use collectively.

The building is enriched by the bucolic views that surround the school. Contact with the animals enhances the children's awareness and understanding of the variety of animal life and caring for them reinforces their appreciation of their responsibilities. The children talk about the animals very knowledgeably. They hatched chickens in the school and now collect their eggs, and they feed the animals. These animals make a unique and positive contribution to the education of the children attending the nursery.

In addition, the children are involved in planting and harvesting vegetables, which are then included in the lunch menu. On the day of the first re-accreditation visit there was a huge pumpkin for the children to explore in the outside area. Opportunities for engaging with the natural world are plentiful for all the children, both inside and out, and nature tables are very much in evidence.

The owners recently received planning permission to build a new school which will also accommodate the nursery for the older children. This plan will extend the facilities of the Old School House and provide opportunities for refurbishment of many of the learning resources.



### **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 The Old School House. The children are encouraged to do things for themselves and engage in activities that they enjoy and which offer them an appropriate level of challenge. As a result, children are making excellent progress in all areas of learning.

The children in the main building have access to a snack table during the morning; it remains open until all children who wish to snack have had an opportunity to do so. On the day of the visit milk, water, fruit and chocolate nests the children had made were on offer for the two older groups. Following the recommendations made at the first visit, the staff have repositioned the snack tables, the children wash up, pour drinks and help themselves with less adult supervision; these changes have greatly enhanced the children's opportunities for self-directed development. The lunchtime arrangements were also reviewed and offer children opportunities to make choices and be independent during this social time at nursery. The children now lay the tables, fetch their lunch and help themselves to their own drinks. Children who bring their own lunch are also now provided with crockery. The very youngest children all have their snack and lunch together on low tables and chairs.

The children now access their wide range of materials independently for a minimum of 2¾ hours in the morning and afternoon. This facilitates the calm transition to lunch as the children can choose to carry on working, lay the tables or join a small group for a story before washing their hands for lunch. Excellent use is made of the space to provide an environment that promotes their independence.

Children in the main building can sleep after lunch, with the staff being careful to follow the children's own routines. The babies can also sleep when they want to in a separate area which is accessible to them at all times.

The older children show a high level of respect for their environment and readily respond to the expectations of those who work with them. The low shelving facilitates the children's ability to put their work back in the appropriate place when they have finished. The children are able to work on their own, in pairs or in small groups throughout the morning and afternoon work cycles in all areas of the classroom and outside. Staff promote respect by effective role modeling and by encouraging the children to resolve their disputes themselves if they can.

The relationship the school has with the parents is highly effective. This partnership is greatly valued and supports the children's progress. Parents stated that they were extremely happy with the school. The website is very informative and the principal blogs regularly online. Montessori curriculum information evenings are provided for the parents. All these methods of communication are used to encourage parents to promote their child's independence at home.



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

The majority of the children now arrive early for breakfast club at 8.00 and are able to self-select activities as soon as they arrive in school.

Snack and meal times are very sociable occasions. The children are developing excellent table manners and are well supported in their independence as well as being encouraged to use cutlery appropriately. The majority of the children stay for a cooked lunch and the classes eat separately in their own rooms. Washing up facilities for all the children in the main building have been provided and the children now wash their glasses and plates in the sinks in the classrooms. The afternoon routine runs similarly to the morning, with a shorter afternoon work cycle. An afternoon meal is provided for the children who stay all day.

The excellent communication between the staff ensures that they all have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities across the day. Classroom procedures and staff responsibilities are described on the school's notice boards and information on the EYFS is also available.

All staff monitor all the children in their room and all take equal responsibility to ensure that the children's records are up to date. All the teachers are able to liaise with the parents. Staff deployment is effective.

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

The plans for learning are underpinned by the Montessori philosophy, principles and curriculum with reference to the EYFS learning objectives. Partnership with parents is excellent and they are very appreciative of the efforts the staff put in to keep them informed of their children's progress, both at collection times and via the electronic app which is used to record information on the child's learning activities. The staff's strong focus on working in partnership with parents and carers helps to ensure that the children's needs are successfully met. The children are allocated to a key person when they have been settled in the school. This information could be included in the digital records.

There is an excellent balance between adult-led and self-chosen learning opportunities, and through their observations the staff know the children well enough to match presentations and activities to the children's ages and stages of development. Following the recommendations from the first re-accreditation visit the staff are developing a system to track the children's use of the environment during a work cycle to enhance their record keeping and assessment of the children's learning and to give a more insightful picture of their current interests, needs and learning potential.

There is a very comprehensive settling-in procedure in place for children when they





start at the nursery, which is appreciated by the parents. The parents are able to attend Montessori information evenings during the year, at which they can learn about the activities that their children undertake. Very comprehensive summative reports are written for the next school when a child leaves and these are written under EYFS areas of learning. The parents are able to access information through the website, school notice boards and Facebook. Photographs of the adults responsible for safeguarding are now displayed on the notice boards outside each class. This could be extended to displaying photographs of all the staff with their specific roles and responsibilities. The allergy list includes a photograph of each child affected and is prominently displayed in each room.

### **Staffing:**

The owner is fully intent on developing the existing good practice and demonstrates a profound commitment to the school. The owner and the managers are well-qualified and work full time in the school. They all hold a Montessori diploma and two of these three also have relevant teaching degrees. Six further staff members hold a Montessori qualification. Two members of staff in the baby room are trained to NVQ level 3 and two to NVQ level 2 and one also holds a Montessori diploma. One of the managers effectively oversees practice in this room. Teamwork is strong and all staff feel that they are valued. Although specific staff roles such as SEND coordinator are delegated to members of the team, this information could be more clearly defined and known by all. Staff training is on-going.

The induction procedure is very effective and the newest member of staff has felt very well supported. A clear understanding of responsibilities and the principal's receptive attitude to her staff and their suggestions make for a happy team. Minuted monthly meetings take place and staff are provided with an agenda. The classroom leaders monitor the curriculum and all the staff are involved with planning and writing the children's developmental records. The same job descriptions are used for all the staff.

Following the first re-accreditation visit it was recommended that written peer-on-peer observations be implemented to improve professional development and the dialogue to support this. This is still in its initial stage. Most of the staff have worked together for many years and there is a strong sense of cohesion between them.

The excellent commitment to continual development has motivated the principal and her team to plan an ambitious building project to extend and improve the nursery. The setting's 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 of reports: First visit – 2 October 2014

Second visit – 23 January 2015