

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 relevant 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 and considered 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.

Receiving accreditation carries the expectation that settings will continue to work on the issues highlighted in this report and will remain committed to the ongoing development of their practice. Furthermore, that they 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.

Chagford Montessori Nursery School

Moor Park, Lower Street, Chagford, Devon TQ13 8BX

Date of previous MEAB accreditation: November 2013

Date of first reaccreditation visit: 9 February 2017

Date of second reaccreditation visit: 14 June 2017

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 school:

Chagford Montessori Nursery School first opened in 1997 and was re-registered under the current manager in July 2007. The setting is co-owned by the manager and administrator, who both take an active part in the day-to-day running of the setting. The nursery is located in Chagford, a thriving town on the edge of Dartmoor, and has sole use of a converted bungalow. The property has two secure and enclosed outdoor areas offering a wide range of experiences for the children on grass, bark chips, paving and soft tarmac surfaces. The building has one spacious room for the children along with two smaller rooms (one of which is known as the music room), cloakroom facilities, an office

and kitchen.

The nursery offers two sessions daily between the hours of 09.00 and 16.00, Monday to Thursday during term times. There are 30 children on roll who attend for a variety of days during the week. The maximum number of children attending any session is 20. Thirteen children attended the morning session on the day of the second reaccreditation visit. Four children left after lunch and another two arrived for the afternoon session. Children who stay for lunch bring packed lunches from home, snack is provided. Chagford Montessori Nursery School supports children with additional needs, including those who have English as a second language.

There are four members of staff employed in addition to the part-time administrator and the manager, who works flexibly full- or part-time as needed. Some staff members work part-time. On the day of the second visit three members of staff, an Early Years apprentice, a Montessori student on professional placement and the manager were working directly with the children. The manager holds a Montessori International Diploma and Early Years Professional Status, her deputy and the three other members of staff are Montessori qualified.

Summary

Chagford Montessori Nursery School is a well-established early years Montessori environment. The dedicated staff team works together diligently to provide a rich learning experience. The adults regularly reflect on and develop their practice to meet the individual learning needs of each child and observe and record progress with insightful consideration. They are respectful and effective role models, offering the children freedom to develop as independent learners supported by clear Montessori routines and practices.

The Montessori environment both indoors and outside is prepared with a high level of thoughtful care and provides a broad range of opportunities for children's learning and spontaneous interaction with the materials. It is vigilantly maintained. The children are confident and engaged learners; they are able to focus on their work and are relaxed and calm throughout the ordered daily routine. They enjoy coming into nursery.

The parents are supportive of the setting and appreciative of the sensitive and respectful teaching offered. They like the effective methods of communication and attention to detail and how the information on their child's progress is shared and celebrated. Since the previous MEAB accreditation the setting has embedded a computerized record-keeping system. This is used to chart the children's progress through the Montessori curriculum and Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) and enables individual targets to be set for each child.

Following recommendations made during the first reaccreditation visit, efforts have been made to extend the 'voice' of each child within their own Yellow Book by, for

example, encouraging them to contribute to it by taking photographs of their favourite activities. This initiative has been effective. Each Book now reflects the individual character and interests of its owner. Further opportunities for purposeful mark-making and writing have also been introduced successfully, and the range and scope of the outdoor activities have been extended in all curriculum areas. Creative numeracy materials, attractive labels and a variety of activities to encourage large motor co-ordination and focus make this a vibrant learning area. Additional Montessori-based numeracy materials have also been introduced indoors.

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

Philosophy:

The principles of the Montessori approach are firmly embedded in this setting, which enables children to become confident and independent learners. The adults are sensitive to the individual interests and skills of each child and ably support their learning in all areas of the Montessori curriculum, both indoors and outside. Positive role-modelling is a particular strength: the children are guided courteously in their choice of activity within this rich and ordered Montessori environment and they absorb the staff's respectful approach. From the moment the children arrive, it is clear that they know and understand the routine of the setting well, moving between the rooms and outdoors independently, choosing resources and completing cycles of activity with confidence. They ask for help as necessary and enjoy the mixed age range; they remind each other of what needs to be done and older children willingly help those younger than themselves. They are obviously relaxed and confident within the routines and there is a discernible sense of calm and peace in this setting. The experienced staff members work as a capable team who communicate effectively and use their sound knowledge and understanding of the children well.

A respectful relationship with parents is built on strong communication links. Knowledge of children's needs and interests is shared very effectively. The Montessori approach of the nursery is defined in writing in the prospectus and on the setting's website, and is embedded into the policy documents. Time is allocated during staff meetings for discussion and review of this documentation and approach.

Learning and Development:

This is a rich and well-resourced Montessori environment with activities appropriate for all the children's needs and interests. It is evident that a great deal of care and attention has been invested in the choice and range of materials in each curriculum area, resulting in an extensive range of Montessori and other developmentally appropriate

resources and activities.

The children confidently make their choices of activity in all areas of the setting. They know and understand the ground rules and only gentle reinforcement of these by staff is necessary to maintain the order and structure of the daily practice. Children work alone, collaboratively or with a member of the teaching team. The children sustain focus and concentration. Their choices of activity are respected by their peers and by the adults, who offer alternatives when necessary to promote learning and to guide creative energies appropriately.

The adults are very responsive and able to adapt to fulfill a specific need (such as when a child is settling into the nursery and requires a flexible approach), and during the first reaccreditation visit a child's wish to make a card for a family member was instantly and sensitively supported by a member of staff. The team respects the children as independent learners, providing just the level of support needed and offering planned and spontaneous challenges based on their knowledge and observations.

The morning work cycle begins from the moment the children arrive and continues until 11.45, when the children gather in the music room for a group activity before lunchtime. The outdoor area is open for free-flow access at around 10.00 and the children can then choose when to go outside, accompanied by designated staff. Self-service snack is available and forms part of each child's work cycle. Transition times and the lunch routine are well managed. The afternoon work cycle begins from about 13.00 and continues until the children leave at 16.00. Different opportunities, such as extended outdoor play and group times, are available in the afternoon, which offers variety to those children who attend all day.

Long term planning is done by staff collaboratively and is based on broad themes and concepts, taking the children's interests into account. Termly topics are integrated into the setting's curriculum without overshadowing the fundamental Montessori activities. At the second visit a range of activities across the curriculum reflected the term's Water theme.

Planning for individual children is primarily the responsibility of the key person, and this incorporates the Montessori curriculum together with the EYFS areas of learning and development. Staff members identify targets for each child using developmental statements and record next steps that specify which resources or activity could be used to help the child progress towards these targets. These focused plans are practical and measurable; they are shared with the parents on a termly basis and include a section for parental comment. Parents appreciate this attention to detail.

The adults observe and record progress subtly, using photographs, notes and longer written observations that identify characteristics of effective learning. They input information into the electronic record-keeping system, which is securely linked to a parental portal. Any member of staff can add to a child's records and can respond to interests recorded in their home/nursery link book, such as setting up nature investigations outside to extend a child's current fascinations. Cohort tracking of specific groups of children is also undertaken. This excellent record-keeping and planning is

supplemented by the children's Yellow Books, which are maintained by the child's key person and include dated and annotated photographs as well as examples of creative work and photographs taken by the children. Following the recommendation made at the first visit, each Yellow Book is now individualised by the child, reflecting its owner's interests and character. It is evident that the team dedicates time and energy to maintaining these valuable records.

From September 2017 the nursery is implementing an electronic record-keeping system.

Prepared Environment: resources and materials

The main room has clearly defined areas of the curriculum on low-level shelving and is well ordered. It has a full range of Montessori materials supplemented with other resources intended to support learning and development in line with the EYFS Framework. Wall shelves made to accommodate Montessori sensorial, maths and geometry materials are particularly effective in allowing children easy access to the resources. Many activities include the opportunity to consolidate learning, such as an abacus with an integrated chalk board, and a game that helps reinforce understanding of the concept of colour with coloured dice. The children have space to work at tables or on the floor using large floor mats.

The literacy area is spacious and inviting, with a comfortable well-stocked book corner. A wall hanging with pockets displays the sandpaper letters at child level. A small table with chairs is ideal for 1:1 or small group activities. The Montessori literacy resources are supplemented with well-chosen phonic books and games that promote mark-making, writing and reading opportunities. This area was well used during the reaccreditation visits by both boys and girls. Following the first visit, further opportunities for purposeful mark-making and writing have also been introduced successfully, such as charts for the care of the pet rabbits. The range of Montessori numeracy materials has also been broadened.

The large cultural area is also well stocked and looks out over the garden area, reinforcing the links with the natural environment outside. Opportunities to explore shells, sea creatures and stones are available alongside puzzles and matching activities. During both visits the current topic themes of Little Explorers (Asia) and Water were evident and activities included a Chinese lantern craft activity and decorating shortbread fish for Father's Day. Wall displays made by the children also reflected each theme. The art area with an easel, junk modelling and playdough was well used. A small digital tablet has recently been introduced into the setting. A name chart used by the children, together with an egg timer, helps ensure their use of the tablet is shared. Regular trips to the local library, dental practice, church and fire station are arranged to enhance projects and provide added interest, and visitors are invited in to share their skills and experiences with the children on an ad hoc basis, such as a professional drummer.

Interesting and appropriate practical life resources are also clearly displayed and used frequently. Children understand how to complete a cycle of activity and their

independent use of the snack table in the main room further develops co-ordination skills, providing cutting and pouring opportunities as well as those for washing and drying up in the low accessible sink. All the adults are vigilant in maintaining the order of the environment and the children use appropriate cleaning materials such as the dustpan, mop and brush as necessary. Spills of water and sand are cleared up quickly and confidently by the children. One of the smaller rooms is used for musical and other group activities, and the other is used for reading stories, imaginative and role play, and offers a place for children to sleep should they wish.

The outside learning environment is accessible for much of the day, once a sign is displayed which indicates to the children that the outdoors is open. The tarmac-surfaced playground has a climbing frame and slide, playhouse, giant xylophone and mud kitchen. The garden area is linked to the playground by a path and has grass, flowerbeds and a digging patch, a willow den, small pond, a sand pit and an interesting water table, along with a stage and a large hutch for the two pet rabbits. The children were keen to enter the hutch, handle and feed these rabbits during the first visit and were sensitively supported in doing so by a member of staff. A range of other resources which reflect the children's current interests is stored accessibly in both outdoor areas, and includes throwing and catching games and a tricycle. Following the first visit, more activities including numeracy resources and a weather observation station have been added to further enhance the children's learning opportunities outside. The range of activities within the setting, both indoors and out, is excellent and appropriate for the age of the children. It is designed to promote confident learning in all areas. Activities and resources are rotated to reflect the changing needs and interests of the children.

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

The promotion of children's independence is an embedded strength of this setting and this practice is outstanding. Children are fully aware of the daily routines; they clearly make self-initiated choices of activity in each area of the setting and can choose to join group activities as they wish. Throughout both reaccreditation visits they completed their cycles of activity in all curriculum areas without prompting. The children freely access the outside area and dress themselves appropriately for the weather. Once outside they choose activities and explore freely, being monitored discreetly by staff members, for example they handle and feed the rabbits with minimal help. The children also manage themselves very capably at the snack table, clearly understanding that they need to tidy up and wash their cups and plates once finished to make the place ready for the next person. At lunch time two 'lunch helpers' prepare the tables; all the children eat in the main room and then tidy up independently.

The adults demonstrate respect for each other and each child, role-modelling this effectively. They sustain a peaceful environment and gently reinforce the few ground rules. They use positive language, offer solutions for conflict resolution as necessary, and use open-ended questioning to promote individual learning. The children in turn learn to respect the materials and each other, showing increasing understanding and empathy towards others. Parents appreciate this calm Montessori approach, stating that the children thrive in this setting, with their different needs and personalities being

provided for. They identify that the respectful approach of the staff offers a valuable sense of empowerment to the child.

Montessori Practice: links with parents, including reports and records

The key person system works very effectively in this setting. Each key person takes responsibility for the planning and updating of records for their group of children and is the first point of contact for the child and their parents. Daily contact with staff is offered to parents. Staff and parents also share significant information about the children's health, welfare and 'sparks of interest' through the home/nursery link books, which are in daily use as required. For example, on the day of the second reaccreditation visit, it was noted that a child had suddenly made a connection with numbers, which was celebrated by the teaching team.

In following a recommendation made at the previous MEAB accreditation, the computerized record-keeping system is now fully embedded and this is used to share information with parents very effectively and securely. The software is used by staff to produce a written update on each child's progress every term, which is stored in a yellow folder that is sent home on a termly basis. The adults also compile examples of artwork, mark-marking, children's stories and annotated and dated photographs into the child's Yellow Book. This helps staff, children and their parents celebrate each child's learning journey, highlighting their achievements and interests during their time at the nursery. Parents report how much they enjoy these Yellow Books, which are sent home each half-term, with many contributing their own comments. Following a recommendation made at the first visit, the teaching team now ask children to take photographs of their favourite activities within the setting, which are then included in the Yellow Books with comments. Some of the results have been surprising and have led to further understanding of the child's perspective.

The electronic record-keeping system which is being introduced from September 2017 will enable more proactive reporting to parents.

Parents are most appreciative of the gentle and purposeful atmosphere at this setting and of the respectful way staff members treat their children as individuals. They receive a parent handbook when their children first start and take up the opportunity to attend parent talks that are held annually and which discuss the principles of a Montessori approach to educating children of this age. The mandatory two year old progress checks are carried out and shared with parents. Transition reports are prepared when the child leaves and parents are invited in for the child's 'leaving ceremony' to mark the end of their time spend at Chagford Montessori Nursery School.

Regular informative newsletters are produced for the parents and they are invited to come to an annual open day and attend their child's Montessori birthday celebrations. A library of Montessori texts and child development books is available for them to borrow from. Links with parents and carers are excellent.

Staff: qualifications, deployment, and performance management

It is evident that staff members are committed to providing a sound Montessori approach, led by the experienced and dedicated manager. They are a strong teaching team. They work together in the best interests of the children, adapt flexibly to changing circumstances, and communicate effectively to respond to the needs of those in their care.

Staff roles and responsibilities are clear and are set out on a weekly Rota, with one member of staff being 'presenter', another 'overseer' and a third member being the 'observer-outside' practitioner. During the reaccreditation visits these roles were implemented seamlessly. Job descriptions are also clear; they refer to Montessori practice and are used as a basis for annual staff appraisals together with termly supervision meeting notes. New members of staff have a three month trial period during which time they work through 'a competencies at work' checklist. This is found to be extremely useful for new staff. The setting regularly attracts students on professional practice placement and their contribution is valued by the permanent teaching team.

Minuted staff meetings are held every half-term, attendance is compulsory and policies, procedures and practice are reviewed regularly. Ad hoc meetings are held as necessary. The manager and deputy share information effectively, act as Montessori mentors for new members of staff and students, and are working towards collaborative responsibility for curriculum areas. The setting's development plan includes a target to visit more Montessori settings locally. Outcomes of visits already undertaken have been shared within the teaching team and have been used to identify further areas for development of the setting and its staff.

The nursery operates training workshops for Montessori Centre International students. The majority of the team members are Montessori trained and one is an Early Years Apprentice. Staff members are committed to their ongoing professional development: they attend local authority training days as well as local and national Montessori meetings and conferences. They are able to reflect very effectively on their practice in order to continue to improve their Montessori provision for children and their families.

Name of Assessor: Sue Briggs

Date report submitted: First visit – 22 February 2017

Second visit – 16 June 17