

## **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.

#### **Footprints Montessori Day Nursery** Long Reach, West Horsley, Surrey KT24 6LZ

Date of previous MEAB accreditation: November 2013

Date of the first reaccreditation visit: 15 May 2017

Date of second reaccreditation visit: 27 September 2017

This accreditation is valid until December 2021

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

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

Footprints Montessori Day Nursery is situated on a working farm, in a conversion of four farm buildings. The premises comprise a large reception area, five separate classrooms and an office, staffroom, kitchen and cloakroom facilities.

At one end of the building there is an upstairs baby room for children up to 16 months old and a toddler room downstairs for children aged 16 months to 2 years. This has direct access to a secure outside space designated for the sole use of all the children under 2 years old. It has an artificial grass lawn with surrounding border plants and benches. Between the toddler room and reception is the kitchen. The 4 to 5 year old children are also situated at this end of the building in their own room. At the other end of the building is a hallway with two large classrooms leading from it. These are the

classrooms for children aged 2 to 3 years old and those aged 3 to 4. There is a large outdoor area called the 'big garden', which is accessible from both the 3 to 4 year olds' room and the main entrance to the reception. This large outdoor area for children aged over 2 years contains a wide variety of climbing equipment set in a woodchip-covered area, a large soft-surfaced area, an artificial lawn with a raised bed, a sandpit and a pebbled area. There is also a very spacious, open-fronted shed used to store additional outdoor equipment and for play during wet weather. Each class for children over two years old also has a small designated outside area accessible from their room, which serves as their outside classroom.

Footprints Montessori Day Nursery offers a mixture of both full- and part-time places for 51 weeks of the year. Children under 3 years old are required to attend at least two full days per week and those over 3 years old attend at least two half-day sessions per week. While some children attend full time, the majority attend for three days a week. On the day of the second reaccreditation visit 48 children attended during the morning session and 47 stayed for the afternoon, with 15 members of staff being present all day including the chef, Principal and two managers. Of these children, 15 were under 2 years old and were looked after by six of the staff. There are 81 children currently on roll and up to 62 children can attend at any one time.

The nursery is open between 08.00 and 18.00 Monday to Friday and provides breakfast, lunch and tea. Both lunch and tea are cooked on site as children do not bring packed lunches from home. The nursery provides for children for whom English is an additional language, and for those with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

The setting was established in 2005 by the owner who is also the Principal. There are 25 staff employed, of whom 23 work directly with the children. The majority work a ten-hour day for four days each week. Seven staff members hold Montessori diplomas, including the Principal, and 17 hold a qualification in childcare to at least level three. The Principal also has a BA (Hons) degree in Early Childhood Studies and Early Years Teacher Status. The Principal, her deputy and the administration manager make up the management team and cover for each other's absence.

## Summary

This purpose-built nursery is outstanding in its design and offers the children a very well-appointed and exciting environment in which to learn. Both the indoor facilities and those outside have been created with the needs of babies and young children in mind. While the outside areas are predominately covered with artificial surfaces, care is taken to give the children contact with nature.

Since the first reaccreditation visit the staff team has embraced the Montessori principle of 'following the child' wholeheartedly. The time offered for self-initiated and spontaneous learning has been extended to at least three hours in the morning for the children over 2 years old. Promoting opportunities for children's independence was recommended at the previous MEAB accreditation. This recommendation has

been implemented as the children are now offered freedom of choice of activity and learning environment to explore for an extended period each day.

The management of the team is excellent and a flexible staffing structure ensures that children can have their needs met. This is a caring and respectful learning environment in which the adults are willing to assess and improve their practice for the benefit of the children. By addressing the recommendations made, the management team has ensured that all staff members are supported in providing the children with the many advantages that a Montessori education can give them. Links with parents are also very effective.

***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:***

- the staff should continue to monitor the lunch routine and develop a system to reduce still further the time children have to wait for their food; and
- staff members should ensure that children continue to have the choice of whether or not they join the extra activities offered to them.

### **Philosophy:**

The Montessori philosophy is now at the heart of the nursery's practice. The reassessment of their Montessori practice following the first reaccreditation visit has led the staff to now 'follow the children' comprehensively, especially in relation to considering ways to promote their independent learning. The adults' commitment to the Montessori philosophy is evident and they have shown that they are receptive to the evaluation and enhancement of their practice.

The educational environment offers a diverse curriculum which suits the children's needs, interests and stages of development. The children feel comfortable in this environment and engage well with their peers and with the staff. As the children move up through the nursery's classes they are encouraged to build on the skills learnt in their previous rooms. Turn-taking, learning respect for each other and their environment, and enjoying the trust of the adults who work with them enables the children to develop self-discipline. Through their observations and time spent with the children, the adults know the children in their care well and are able to respond quickly to their ever-changing needs.

Following the first visit, the time for the children over 2 years old to self-select activities and work independently in order to follow their inner drives has been extended to at least three hours in the morning. Their work cycles are still punctuated by additional activities, but these are now offered in a way that allows children an element of choice

as to whether they join in or not. Whole group circle times now only take place in the afternoon. These children also have the option to work outside, as their free-flow access to their outdoor areas is now well established. It is recommended that staff continue to ensure that children have the choice of whether or not they join the activities offered to them.

The children are grouped by age. While the different classes sometimes get together, it was recommended at the first visit that an invitation system was developed so that the children could choose to visit and work in other classes. This has been implemented and has promoted a greater mix of ages across the setting, which has proved to be of huge benefit to the whole age range. The older children really enjoy the opportunity to share their newly acquired skills with the younger members of the nursery.

The website and handbook are currently under review and are set to include a more in-depth explanation of Montessori philosophy. Communication with parents is excellent and staff members are available to talk to them on a daily basis when required. The staff team meets annually to discuss the principles, aims and philosophy of the setting, and policies are reviewed when necessary.

### **Learning and Development:**

The babies and toddlers have a suitably challenging environment and the adults encourage these very young children to become independent learners. They are able to follow their own routines to sleep when they need to, while the other children who are awake are able to continue to make full use of their room. Staff members manage the care and feeding routines very well. These under 2 year olds have access to a broad range of resources that support fine and gross motor skill development and, in line with Montessori practice, there is a strong emphasis on activities to enhance sensory perception and heuristic play. Appropriate support is given to these very young children while they investigate their surroundings.

The baby room for those up to 16 months is very well organised. They have equipment to help them develop their movement, a book area and many varied treasure baskets. There is room for babies to crawl, sit and cruise on both carpet and soft rugs. The babies follow their own interests, supported well by the adults, who are sensitive to the needs of these very young children.

The toddler classroom for those aged between 16 and 24 months encourages self-initiated activity, with provision of open shelving and accessible resources. The children learn to engage purposefully with self-chosen activities and are supported in completing their cycles of activity by putting their resources back on the shelves when they have finished. Along with materials that help their language and sensory development, they are introduced to activities which promote care of themselves and their environment. These children enjoyed exploring their varied treasure baskets during both reaccreditation visits. Focused adult-led activities take place, although the children are free to work independently with other materials if they prefer. The work cycles run for up to 2½ hours on some days, although there is a break for snack and timetabled activities,

which are appropriate for this age group. Following a recommendation made at the first visit, they have access to their outdoor area whatever the weather. On the day of the second visit the babies and toddlers enjoyed being outside for an extended period of time during both the morning and afternoon.

Across the setting, a mixture of both planned activities (delivered by an adult to individuals or groups) and opportunities for spontaneous, child-initiated learning is offered. The balance between these two has been reviewed following the first visit, especially for the children over 2 years old. On the day of the second visit the morning work cycles in the three classrooms for children over 2 years were only interrupted by visits to the 'big garden'. Each of these classes has 'Fit and Fun', dancing, yoga and music groups scheduled, although these are no longer compulsory. French tuition is compulsory for the 3 to 5 age range but it now takes place in their classrooms, so that the children can carry on working on self-initiated activities while absorbing French language. The 'big garden' was used extensively on the day of the second visit, with small groups of children going out from each class to enjoy a mixed age range in the garden. The classrooms' individual smaller outside areas were also used throughout the morning work cycle. The children are able to go on woodland walks during the afternoon; this option was available for the babies on the day of the second visit.

There is a consistent approach to learning taken across the setting and across all areas of the curriculum. For example, literacy and numeracy are very well supported throughout. On the day of the second visit the children worked on many varied maths activities: they counted mattresses in a picture book of 'The Princess and the Pea', one child was encouraged successfully to count to a hundred, while others enjoyed using the Montessori early maths materials. Written words are also displayed around the environment, to encourage early reading. Care is taken to ensure that there is at least one Montessori trained staff member present in each room to lead the practice. All staff members know the children well. The materials in each room are skillfully chosen to suit the needs of the children attending.

Children's achievements are recorded and assessed using a digital record-keeping system. Staff members plan well for each child's individual next steps using this system, which combines effectively the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) areas of learning and development with the Montessori curriculum. More general planning for each whole class is compiled and recorded under the EYFS headings and is also effective in supporting children's needs and interests. Parents are kept informed about what their children are going to be doing.

One of the strengths of this nursery is that all staff members in each room have regular opportunities to reflect on the provision and their practice. They make plans to improve their environment and its resourcing according to the changing needs of the children. By implementing the recommendations from the first visit they have significantly enhanced their practice, as they now truly 'follow the child'. Specific support and strategies are put in place for children with additional needs.

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

The light, airy building is well-appointed and designed specifically for the needs of the children. Fish and a lovebird living in the reception area add to the setting's appeal. The range of resources in each room is excellent and well-matched to the children's development and learning needs, and the quality of the resources is very good. They are complete, ready for children to use, and are clearly appealing. Following the first reaccreditation visit, each classroom's layout is now organised according to areas of learning. The resources are arranged very well on shelves and the Montessori curriculum materials are set out in sequence. Putting the materials in sequential order and into curriculum areas has benefited both the children and the staff, as their relevance for the child has become more evident. Labeling the displays and resources has given the children the opportunity to see the written word more frequently in meaningful places.

Each classroom has a plant, one has a hamster, and one has an African snail. Most of the surfaces outside are man-made, but since the first visit more provision for exploring nature has been made in the classrooms and in each class's outside area, to the benefit of the children.

The babies have a very wide variety of materials on offer including suitable soft furnishings, low mirrors, mark-making materials, sound toys and soft dolls and teddies. Within the other classrooms the children are able to work on the floor or at tables and there is sufficient space for either choice. The amount of resources is ample for the number of children in each room. In the babies' room there are two partitioned areas, one of which is darkened and has cots for sleeping. If children are unhappy sleeping there they are able to sleep in the main part of the room as coracles are also available to them. This gives them a great degree of choice and they can independently crawl into the coracles. The other partitioned area is used for messy play and meals. On the day of the first visit they were given a bowl of water with toy ducks floating in it to play with here. The toddler room has beds which can be taken out and put away individually as required. The majority of the toddlers sleep after lunch. The older children are able to rest or sleep after lunch in their classrooms if they choose, and those who do not wish to sleep are supported with quiet activities.

Outside, the quality of the provision is also high, with an excellent range of resources. The 'big garden' is skillfully designed with its well-constructed adventure play equipment, slide and sandpit. Ride-on toys are housed in the large open-fronted shed, which can be used when the weather is inclement and as a storage area. All three of the classrooms for the children over 2 years old have easy access to their own outside area, which can be set up with classroom materials by the staff to reflect the children's changing needs and interests. There are tables and chairs in these areas and each has a multi-use large shallow tray on a stand, and a planting area. The under 2's own large outside area has a playhouse, slide, static 'mushrooms' to climb on, sand and water play and a planting area.

Staff and children work very well together to maintain their environment. Alongside the checks made on materials to ensure appropriateness for use, the adults support children



in taking care of the environment with use of dustpans, brushes, sponges and cloths. All the children benefit from an excellent learning environment which is prepared well to meet their needs and interests.

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

Children's independence is very well supported. When the children arrive in the morning they can help themselves to breakfast. Beautiful china plates and mugs, with an appealing rabbit motif, are provided. The children are given opportunities throughout the day to develop their skills of independence and the adults are able to promote these with the provision of resources and their support, as required.

Following the recommendations made at the first reaccreditation visit, the longer work cycle in the rooms for children over 2 years old is now used by the adults to positively support the children to engage independently with the materials and their environment for a suitable length of time. This practice provides an appropriate Montessori experience, especially for those children who may only attend for a few days in the week. Following the first visit, children based in the two rooms for the 2 to 4 year olds also now benefit from having freely accessible snack, which now mirrors the practice already in place in the classroom for the 4 to 5 year olds. Free access to their outdoor classroom during the work cycle also helps each child make independent choices and learn more self-care skills. With the introduction of an effective invitation/self-registration system, children have been given the opportunity to work in other classrooms or outside, which further promotes their independent learning. Opening the gate between the two adjacent classrooms' outside areas would extend the practice of vertical age-grouping further, without impacting the dynamics of each class.

Following a recommendation from the first visit the lunch routine has been modified to reduce the time children have to wait before eating. The children no longer sit in a circle group before washing their hands. However, the staff team should continue to review and improve this routine, as the children still have to wait a while for their lunch. The children now prepare the tables themselves, giving them an opportunity to use their skills for real tasks. They are able to serve themselves but are guided by the staff to select a balanced choice of food. All the older children feed themselves. The younger children are encouraged to feed themselves too and when lunch is finished some climb onto their beds unaided. Even the very young children are encouraged to put on and take off their own shoes and to help lay the tables.

Respect is shown by the adults to the children through the flexibility of their provision and planning for the individual, and through the language that is used with them. Returning the resources to their set places and cleaning up after themselves demonstrates children's respect for the environment, and respect for others is promoted very well through group role-play. Ground rules are reinforced appropriately. The team shares information and ideas with parents in order to work with them for the benefit of their children.

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

The setting operates a very effective key person system, with that named person being responsible for the record-keeping and welfare of their children. There is also a key buddy system in place to ensure that each child always has an allocated adult present. This enables staff members to build a strong relationship with the child and their parents, to use their knowledge of the child effectively and to give informed feedback to families. The key person is responsible for completing the mandatory two year old progress check with parents' input, writing reports twice a year and keeping parents informed at formal parents' meetings. The digital record-keeping system is very popular with the parents as they are able to keep up to date with their own child's progress and contribute to their written records when they choose to. This system is securely managed.

Whilst the key person has responsibility for the child's record-keeping, all adults are able to make recorded observations and pass on useful comments about any child. The written reports are used as a transition document between classrooms as well as when the children move on to school. They are compiled under the EYFS areas of learning and development and are comprehensive.

As the children can attend for full days it was suggested at the first reaccreditation visit that the nursery extended its use of individual 'family books' so that each child had one, especially the babies and toddlers. This has been actioned and has given them a meaningful reminder of home. Parents appreciate the contact they have with the staff. All the parents interviewed during both visits were delighted with the high quality of the service offered to them. They appreciate the daily feedback and the organised meetings, as well as the contact they have through the digital system.

### **Staff: qualifications, deployment, and performance management**

The Principal has overall responsibility for managing the nursery and is well supported by the two other members of the management team. She recognises her staff members' individual skills and delegates the running of the classes to the 'room leaders'. The team is well qualified. Two of the adults who work with children under 2 years old are Montessori qualified and the others are also suitably qualified and experienced to work with these youngest children.

Staff members benefit from a supportive induction procedure and clear job descriptions, which make reference to Montessori practice where relevant. Peer-on-peer written observations feed into the annual appraisals and supervision process, which are all informative and comprehensive opportunities for self-evaluation. The management team is able to monitor the staff team's performance effectively. Formal staff meetings take place every six weeks and these are minuted. Informal meetings also take place regularly and opportunities for in-service and external training are provided, which have included Montessori training for all staff in the past. Continuing professional development is embedded in practice.



Teamwork is strong and staff members collaborate well. Respect for the children is also very evident and the children, in turn, are calm and trust the staff. The adults show a willingness to make changes in their practice and routines for the benefit of the children and this was demonstrated by their response to the first reaccreditation visit's feedback. The management team has successfully guided and supported staff in making the recommended improvements in Montessori practice.

Name of Assessor: Charlotte White

Date report submitted: First visit – 16<sup>th</sup> May 2017

Second visit – 28<sup>th</sup> September 2017