



# **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 2012 revisions. The second visit sought to assess the progress made on the recommendations set out in the report from the first 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.

### **Oaklea Montessori**

Windmill Children’s Centre, Mayes Lane, Ramsey, Harwich CO12 5EL

Date of the first accreditation visit: 14 January 2013

Date of the second accreditation visit: 14 May 2013

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

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

Oaklea Montessori is located on the outskirts of Harwich, set in semi-rural surroundings, adjacent to two village primary schools and open fields. The setting has sole use of part of a Sure Start Children’s Centre, with three rooms, children’s cloakroom, staff toilets, kitchenette, laundry, a school office and a reception lobby. It shares a sensory room, staff room, training room and kitchen with other users of the Children’s Centre. The three children’s rooms include Little Sparrows, which is the baby and toddler room, and the Squirrels room for those between 2 and 5 years who also have access to the movement/art room (used for developmental movement play, craft, role play and music). All three rooms have access to secure outside classrooms.

The nursery is open 50 weeks of the year providing flexible sessions between 08:00 and 18:00 for babies and children aged 3 months to 5 years. There are currently 104 children on roll. On the day of the second visit 37 children attended the morning session, with 30 children attending during the afternoon. Of this number 14 children were under the age of 2 years.

All meals are provided, including a hot lunch, which is prepared and cooked off site. The setting makes provision for children with additional needs.

The setting is a social enterprise business, a Community Interest Company, and was established in 2009. There are 20 members of staff who provide the care, education and support. Of this total six team members (including the manager) hold a Montessori International diploma, whilst a further five members are completing their Montessori studies. All permanent staff are



expected to attend Montessori philosophy and practical training delivered by the manager, including those that already hold an appropriate childcare qualification. The manager and one other member of staff also have Early Years Professional Status (EYPS).

## Summary

Oaklea Montessori offers an exciting and stimulating community environment for the children who attend. It aims to provide an inclusive setting that promotes respect, independence and freedom to explore and learn. This is evident in the children's confidence, choosing activities of interest to them whilst engaging with peers and teachers. This is achieved through the team's ability to manage their daily roles and responsibilities in order to meet the individual needs of all the children who attend. During both visits children were seen to freely engage with activities. They were keen to challenge and extend their knowledge by trying new things, either with support or on their own.

Good Montessori practice is evident in all rooms, enabling children to make progress. Opportunities for spontaneous exploration and discovery are promoted through the clearly defined curriculum areas and range of activities on offer. All children have free-flow access to the outside area, which further enhances the range of activities on offer. The consistency of role modeling throughout the setting ensures that the children learn to respect themselves, others and their environment.

A computerized software package enables the team to monitor each individual child's progress in line with both the Montessori curriculum and the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) Framework as well as provide parents with information about their child's progress. Supporting an 'open door' policy, all parents are able to catch up informally with their child's key person on a daily basis. The dedicated leadership and management team role model and promote good reflective practice and inspire and motivate the team's development and career prospects.

Since the first visit the team have worked together and followed a process of observation, reflection and evaluation that has enabled them to make changes in the 3 to 5 year old Squirrels room that clearly promote the children's interests and curiosity, extend challenge and help them make connections in their learning. Children are also encouraged to be more independent during snack time and at lunch. Similar opportunities could be extended further in the baby room. It is also intended that formal parents' meetings, which are opportunities to celebrate children's achievements, are to be offered twice a year.

***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 reflect and evaluate practice in relation to the individual needs of the child.
- Continue to reflect upon the children's need for independence and find further ways during the whole day where the adult can help the children to help themselves and ensure that this approach becomes embedded in practice.

**Philosophy:**

Oaklea Montessori provides a stimulating and inviting environment that meets the needs of the children who attend. The setting aims to offer an inclusive provision for all children and strives to provide an environment that enables the babies, toddlers and older children to have the freedom to investigate, explore and discover the world around them. In practice this is evident in the team's shared vision of promoting independence throughout the setting and in the way the children are trusted, understood and encouraged to move freely across the environments, choosing to play in different groups and classrooms including the outside area.

The encouragement of reflective practice by the leadership team ensures that time is made for all members of staff to participate in regular feedback and discussion. The clear roles and responsibilities of the team, and the shared process of participating in different roles, effectively provides the foundation for all aspects of the class routines to be met consistently. This process of communication and sharing of practice is clear evidence that the procedures in place match the setting's vision.

The nursery's prospectus and website highlight its mission and show how the curriculum and philosophy are delivered to reflect it. This written commitment to the Montessori approach is reviewed regularly at staff meetings by both management and the wider team.

**Learning and Development:**

Oaklea Montessori promotes positive Montessori practice in all rooms. This is seen in the layout and preparation of materials and activities. There are clearly identified areas of learning. The children, especially in the Squirrels classroom, have freedom of movement and choice. They decide between playing in different rooms or outside and this was seen throughout the first visit in the confident way in which the children chose to spread out in small groups, on their own or in pairs, across all areas.

A work cycle is in place, both during the morning and afternoon sessions, which for the majority of the children is in excess of three hours. Small group activities evolve for the Squirrels in their movement/art room. Staff are on hand to help extend learning opportunities for these children when they are asked: for example, during the second visit a child was enjoying a movement activity using a large soft ball and this developed into a small group activity with the support of an adult. For the babies and toddlers (Little Sparrows) much learning happens spontaneously and depends upon what the child chooses to explore. Again, staff support and extend learning as when a baby was playing with lid tops which he then discovered made a sound when knocked together. The practitioner who was nearby extended the discovery by singing a rhyme in rhythm with the baby's beat and others in the room spontaneously came to join in.

Adults in each room plan together and prepare their environment in accordance with the children's individual needs based on the Montessori curriculum. Assessment of learning uses a computer software package that links the Montessori curriculum to the EYFS providing the team and parents with information on both sets of learning outcomes. The teachers' notice board displays the children's next steps, and the team share and monitor their daily observations of the children. Long term topic plans incorporate all aspects of the EYFS.

The children's learning and development across the curriculum is seamless. Because the team trust the children to move freely between the rooms and the outside area they are motivated



and busily engage in activities. The adults capably support this choice, interacting and discussing with them, including those children with additional needs and English as an additional language. During the second visit practitioners in the Squirrels room were seen to provide more space and time for the children to become involved and engaged. They give the children choices, such as by asking "Are you going to make a mouse like the others or make something else from your own thoughts?" Children's conversation across the different play areas demonstrates that they are linking their learning experiences and making connections. This was evident after a small group lesson about transportation on land, air and sea when in later role-play two children continued to talk about how the helicopter could be a sea-copter, flying in the air and floating on the water.

For the babies and toddlers, opportunities to meet individual learning needs in the same way are missed (and consistently throughout the day) due to the structure of the hygiene and care routines.

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

All the classrooms at Oaklea Montessori provide opportunities for independence, exploration, discovery and spontaneous learning. Materials are clean, complete and well displayed. Each room has clearly defined curriculum areas relating to the learning and development aim of the room.

There is a wide range of activities both inside and outside and they are clearly linked to the children's needs and mirror the resources on offer; for example, during the first visit the babies in Little Sparrows were able to discover touch and sound by playing in leaves or climbing over crates to reach saucepans, whilst the children in Squirrels were seen digging and using large construction blocks for building.

Following the staff team's discussion and reflection, the layout of the rooms for the children has been slightly adjusted. The movement room now displays specific activities on hooks, providing a clear choice. During the second visit children selected cushions for rolling on and material from the bags to explore. Although the team have also reflected and made subtle changes in the Little Sparrows room, when the low sleep baskets are put out by staff access to shelves is still not easy for those not sleeping, therefore sometimes restricting the choice for those babies who are awake.

The arrangement of the shelves and of access to the rooms now fits more closely with the aim of meeting all children's developmental needs. Children in transition from the baby room to the pre-school room now benefit from having been able to see through the door between the two environments.

The daily roles and responsibilities of the team are clear and evident in practice. Team members were observed interacting, leading small group activities, maintaining the rooms and gathering observations for assessment throughout the whole day.



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

Children's independence at Oaklea Montessori is fostered through the faith and trust the adults have in the Montessori prepared environment. Children confidently access all aspects of the learning environment. Little Sparrows have the space and time to move, crawl, climb or just sit and explore an activity they have chosen from a shelf. Squirrels are busy socializing, chatting and choosing whether to play together, in a small group or individually. This is further promoted by the uninterrupted work cycle for most children.

Consistent role modeling throughout the nursery promotes the respect the children develop for themselves, for others and for their environment. In the Squirrels room children tidy up after themselves, clean tables, sweep the floor, pour their own drink for snack, serve their own vegetables at lunch and wash up. Following a recommendation made at the first visit the staff have made small changes to the class routines to support more fully the children's desire for the adults to help them. This can be seen throughout the day through the use of words, guidance and instruction that all the team provides. The staff should review the lunchtime routine and consider whether there are any more ways in which they can promote children's choice and independence in the same way it does through play and development.

During the first visit parents confirmed that their child's independence, along with their communication skills, had been developed at Oaklea. They have seen a considerable difference in their child's learning and how they are able to easily transfer this into the home (for example through helping to clean, dress themselves and prepare tea).

### **Montessori Practice: Classroom management**

Learning at Oaklea Montessori is usually spontaneous. Although the team make full use of the recording and assessment software package and carefully evaluate observations of the child's learning in order to plan next steps for them individually, planning does not take precedence over what the children naturally choose on a day to day basis. The outside area promotes spontaneous learning through core activities including a digging area, sand pit, role play and block construction. Heuristic play is provided for both the babies and older children through a different choice of day to day materials that are left out for discovery. During the second visit several children were busy making mud pies and collecting soil from a large container. Another child was busy counting and linking quantities through the use of large number cards and stones which she needed to collect in her basket.

Daily roles and responsibilities offer clear and effective guidelines for each member of the team. This is seen at a glance throughout the nursery by the use of colour sashes that the staff wear, each colour denoting a role. These roles include lead teacher, support teacher and an observer. This aspect of classroom management is continued through the lunch routine and therefore provides children with continuity of care. The children are vertically grouped (birth to 2 years, 2 to 5 years) with both sets enjoying the benefits of a mixed age range

Space and low cot-beds are provided for the Little Sparrows at various times throughout the day and, although these are laid out, the babies choose if they want to use them. After lunch in the Squirrels room, space is available for quiet time.



The nursery provides clear and concise documentation relating to its policies and procedures. Many of these are clearly displayed throughout the nursery in appropriate places, including the school office and staff room. Moreover, links to the school's development plan and required actions are clearly displayed in both the office and staff room, enabling everyone to participate, communication to be clear and target dates to be met.

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

Adults' roles are defined clearly in each room. The responsibilities associated with each role are clearly displayed. This aspect of team work is very effective. The wearing of a particular colour sash to denote your role for the day ensures that there is a seamless flow of care for the children as the team know instantly who will deal with particular needs at any one moment.

Observations of the children are collected daily by the team member responsible for that task. During the second visit it was apparent that the team have become more comfortable with the definitions of 'effective learning' in the EYFS and their use of descriptive words in their observations clearly provides evidence of this. The recording and assessment program enables the team to link the Montessori curriculum with the EYFS. Weekly planning is easily collated using this system and this is the responsibility of the key person. This process enables the team to plan well for the individual child and each child has a Learning Journey containing samples of work and observational photos. The final evaluation and assessment of learning and the 2 year old summative assessments are prepared by the nursery manager. Transition reports for children moving on were reviewed during the second visit. These are produced from the records, and they include all the child's observations in date order and provide evidence for the evaluative summary that links the areas achieved to the goals of the EYFS.

Parents have a variety of opportunities to receive feedback about their child's progress. The most popular means is the informal, day to day chats that each key person has with parents/carers. All parents are invited to a regular celebration of their child's 'journey', which gives them an opportunity to understand the classrooms and activities more, as well as spending additional valuable time with the key person and nursery manager. Parents speak highly of the team, the documentation and the support that they are given. There is sufficient information throughout the nursery for parents to build an understanding of both the Montessori philosophy and the EYFS. Following a recommendation made at the first visit parents who attend their 'invitation to celebrate the child' meeting are taken through a short presentation on the EYFS. Parents indicated that this, together with a new poster on display at the school entrance, has enhanced their awareness and understanding of the EYFS. It is intended that all parents are to be offered a minimum of two meetings per year, as opposed to the present one.

### **Staffing:**

There is a strong leadership and management team in place at Oaklea Montessori. Together with the clear structure of daily roles and responsibilities, this ensures effective communication and continuity of practice throughout the setting. For parents, this organizational structure is clearly documented at the entrance of the nursery.



A clear development plan is in place. Team members are encouraged to participate in this review and a 'wish list' is available in the staff room for them to contribute to. Currently the emphasis is on enhancing the outside area and working towards more continuity of the learning provision for the children between inside and outside.

Clear induction procedures are in place and focus on important aspects of safeguarding and children's welfare. As part of the induction process new staff are given a questionnaire to answer that encourages them to read the policies and procedures, ask questions of team members and reflect on the practice. Annual appraisals form part of the team's continued professional development and currently they are working together to incorporate peer observation. A variety of suggestions and strategies are being looked at. Regular staff meetings provide opportunities for sharing knowledge and understanding and support on-going self-reflective practice; these meetings are recorded clearly. In engaging with the recommendations made at the first visit, the team's ability to communicate, reflect and respond to action is outstanding. Evidence of their ability to move forward with ideas is seen throughout the setting in the ways the systems in place merge together. In particular the links from the development plan to individual action plans and room planning are exemplary.

All team members hold a childcare qualification. Staff work together well, supporting and respecting each other throughout the day. The team's commitment and dedication to the nursery's vision and to the community it serves is clearly apparent in the way the children socialize, respect and respond to their friends and their environment.

Name of Assessor: Dawn Nasser

Date of reports: First visit – 28 January 2013

Second visit – 17 May 2013