

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 the setting 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.

Oaklea Montessori CIC

Ogilvie Small Hall, Wignall Street, Lawford, Manningtree, Essex CO11 2JG

Date of first accreditation visit: 13 September 2016

Date of second accreditation visit: 7 December 2016

This accreditation is valid until 31 July 2021

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

Description of the nursery:

Oaklea Montessori is one of a group of three nurseries registered by the same business entity, Oaklea Montessori Community Interest Company. It was established in September 2013 and is based in the village of Lawford near Colchester. The nursery is held in a small community hall. There is an entrance lobby, two classrooms (one main and one movement room), a kitchen, a small office, and cloakroom facilities. To one side of the building there is a spacious garden area which is mainly grass with mature trees, raised vegetable beds and a tarmacked area for ride-on toys. There is a gated entrance to the garden and direct access into one of the classrooms. The nursery has sole use of its facilities during its opening hours; however, the premises are shared so the nursery's resources are set up daily.

It is open for 50 weeks of the year, from 08.30 to 17.00, Monday to Friday. There are currently 12 children on roll, who attend a variety of morning, afternoon, or all day sessions. Snack is provided and hot lunches are brought in daily by a catering company. The nursery makes provision for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities and for those with English as an additional language.

The company proprietor is Montessori Level 7 qualified and an Early Years Professional; she oversees the three settings and leads the group's shared management team. The nursery manager of this setting works part-time and holds a Level 4 Montessori Diploma. She is supported by four other part-time staff, three who are Montessori qualified including the deputy, and a student teacher. At the second visit there were six children present, with three qualified staff members and the student.

Summary

Oaklea Montessori is a delightful and calm setting where children are listened to and respected from the moment they enter the nursery. The team show considerable experience, wisdom and patience with children and allow sufficient time to enhance their opportunities for independence, learning and confidence building. The use of consistent and clear language is a strength of the nursery, which encourages children to learn to respect themselves, others and their environment. The nursery fully promotes the Montessori approach and staff members demonstrate a commitment to the philosophy. The team work hard to develop strong links with families.

Following the first visit the team have developed the provision: in the movement room resources for imaginative and creative play have been added, such as for music and Jabadeo (developmental movement play). Outdoors, new equipment has been introduced, including a playhouse and a small slide, and a willow tunnel is planned for the spring. These resources offer children exciting new opportunities for exploration, risk-taking and creativity.

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 management team should start to consider how records of staff supervisions, peer to peer observations and appraisals may be used more effectively to review staff performance and to plan for continuing professional development.

Philosophy:

Oaklea Montessori provides an excellent, welcoming and calm Montessori environment. Children are given every opportunity to develop independence and confidence as a result of the attention and commitment of all staff to the Montessori ethos. Adults know the children very well and are adept at following their interests and providing activities to help them fulfill their unique potential. Through close observation they record, assess and plan effectively for each child's needs. Adults demonstrate trust in children by supporting their natural desire to explore, investigate and understand their surroundings.

Children have the freedom to move about the spacious garden or indoors, and to select resources, explore independently, or participate in planned activities. Adults very effectively support the development of self-esteem, social skills, good manners and self-discipline. They use consistent language as described in an excellent positive language policy.

The goals and Montessori principles of the nursery are clearly stated in the Operational Plan, on the excellent website, and in written information for new parents. These are reviewed each year by the management team across the three settings and the quality of Montessori provision is reviewed regularly at staff meetings attended by staff from all three nurseries in the group.

Learning and Development:

Oaklea Montessori provides very good opportunities for learning and development across all areas of the indoor and outdoor environment. Children are greeted at the garden gate and they settle well, selecting activities outdoors from the well laid out resources and apparatus. Indoor activities have been thoughtfully arranged into the Montessori areas of learning and are accessible to all children. As a small and close team, the adults work very effectively to follow the lead of children, supporting their learning at every opportunity and moving between the indoor and outside environments as required. The organisation of routines is excellent; staff members are familiar with their daily role as either a 'facilitator', a 'practitioner' or an 'observer'. Coloured sashes are worn to ensure everyone is aware of these designated roles and this practice enhances the harmony of the setting.

The morning and afternoon work cycles are about three hours in length. In the morning very good opportunities are given for spontaneous self-initiated learning, both in and outside. Children's language and thinking skills are very ably supported by staff. They use consistent language and open-ended questioning techniques, and encourage the children to develop critical thinking skills, such as during a planned 'flour and oil' activity on the day of the second visit.

Snack is provided, and lunch is part of the afternoon work cycle, followed by a choice of story-time, indoor or outdoor play. Children have a genuine choice throughout the day with regard to their activities and the space in which they wish to work. There is an appropriate balance of adult-led and child-initiated activities and effective plans,

procedures and resources are in place for children with additional needs.

All staff members across the three nurseries are actively involved in the planning process. They take turns to plan in three-weekly blocks and they are adept at linking all areas of the Montessori curriculum with those of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) through their use of a digital record-keeping system. Children's progress and areas of interest are tracked effectively by key persons. They ensure that all areas of children's development are considered in individual planning and that confidentiality of records is upheld. The proprietor offers regular appraisals and training to support staff in their practice and thereby reviews the effectiveness of the learning and development provision at the nursery. This support is reflected in the knowledge staff have of child development, appropriate language skills and of the Montessori ethos. It is recommended that records of this support are made more easily available. Children are very well provided for by this experienced team of Montessori practitioners.

Prepared Environment: resources and materials

The adults ensure that the resources are thoughtfully arranged at the start of each day and remain well organised throughout the sessions. The indoor environment has been carefully planned with the child in mind, creating separate and comfortable areas of learning, with appropriate wall displays and many natural resources. Individual hand-made resources, such as brightly coloured storage bags, and the addition of plants enhance the ambience of the main classroom. There is a good range of developmentally appropriate Montessori activities, puzzles and books, which are accessible, ordered and clean. Staff create space for lunch within the room very effectively and children help maintain the order of the room through their use of child-sized cleaning brushes and other equipment. Following a recommendation from the first visit many resources have been placed in baskets or in open boxes. Some of these have a clear photograph attached which acts to support children in their independent use. This rearrangement enhances the children's exploration and adds interest and colour to the shelves.

The smaller classroom, the movement room, has also been developed following the first visit. Staff members have improved the resources and activities in this area. For example, named coat pegs and boot racks have been installed close to the door to the garden, thereby providing further opportunity for children's independence. Drawstring bags, hung at the child's level, have been added which contain resources such as light-weight scarves. A music player, soft mats and cushions have also been made available. These improvements have enhanced the nursery's provision for creative, imaginative and role play activities. They also demonstrate the staff's keenness to improve their provision.

The spacious garden provides a range of opportunities for learning. Children independently select from a good and diverse choice of Montessori activities set up on outdoor shelving and they complete their cycles of activity by returning the resources when they are finished. The areas of learning are clearly laid out and labeled, with good supplementary resources; for example, there is a water butt with watering cans positioned by a planting area so children can independently care for their plants. A

beautiful sensory garden is a recent addition to the outside area and children take delight in talking about what has been planted. There are some opportunities for imaginative play with water and sand activities, a mud kitchen and some ride-on vehicles. Since the first visit additional outdoor resources have been made available. For example a colourful playhouse, a small slide and a tent are provided for children to explore, to climb into and to hide in. These resources enhance opportunities to develop physical skills, role play and language skills, and give more opportunity for small group imaginative play. Further resources, such as a willow arch and tree planting, are planned for the spring. The team are aware of the need to continue to review outdoor activities, how frequently they are used by the children, and whether additional resources are required as the number of children at the nursery increases.

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

Children's independence is strongly fostered throughout Oaklea Montessori's day. It is evident that children are given time and freedom to choose activities and move between indoors and outdoors within the work cycle periods, which helps ensure that they are able to follow their interests and to complete tasks effectively, gaining confidence from doing so. There are very good opportunities for children to repeat activities as well as for individual discovery; during the second visit a child eagerly selected a carrot grating activity, really enjoyed the task and then returned the activity and cleared away the peelings independently. Small and large group activities are planned and children are given the freedom to join these. Members of staff gently remind children about the setting's ground rules and about caring for each other. Children show independence by confidently finding their slippers from their bags, washing hands after gardening activities and tidying away after themselves.

Snack is prepared by the adults and children are encouraged to help themselves to the healthy food and pour their drink when they choose. This works very well and children enjoy this independent activity, they happily chat to each other and wash up when they have finished. At lunchtime a staff member sits at the table with the children, acting as a good role model by encouraging respect, table manners and convivial conversation. Independence is again fostered as children help themselves or others to food, scrape plates at the end of the meal and clear away dishes. Children can sleep in the comfortable book area if they need to.

Staff work very well as a small team to ensure that information from their observations is used effectively to plan for next steps in the children's development and that their independence is fully promoted. Daily discussions with parents, an informative website and leaflets enable parents to feel informed about how independence is embraced at the nursery and how it may be encouraged at home. Recent 'Invitation to Celebrate' parent events have been used by staff to help ensure that parents are aware of who their child's key person is and of how their child's learning and development is progressing; these events offer a chance to discuss a child's independence, current interests and possible next steps in development.

Montessori Practice: links with parents, including reports and records

Oaklea Montessori has strong links with families and parents speak highly of the knowledgeable, friendly and open communication they have with staff at the nursery. It is for this reason that many families choose the nursery following an initial visit with the manager.

Managers in each of the three settings take turns to lead the planning of topics which are then co-ordinated across – and resources shared amongst – the nurseries. Key persons review and compile individual plans once a fortnight, ensuring that the child's possible next steps, schemas, new interests and information from home are incorporated. Relevant observations, child assessments and progress records are documented electronically and securely on the digital system and individual plans are displayed in the main classroom so all staff are aware of a child's next steps. Progress and assessment records are shared with parents twice a year during their attendance at 'Invitation to Celebrate' events. These meetings enable small groups of parents to access the nursery for an hour to discuss their child's progress and records, and for the manager to share information about the Montessori ethos and practices. The team work closely with families of children with additional needs to ensure that they are supported appropriately, with specific planning and care routines set for them. These plans are available in the main class for staff to refer to in their work.

Regular and informative newsletters are distributed to parents and posted on the website. Baseline assessments are carried out when children join and mandatory two year old progress checks are completed as appropriate. Final developmental statements are generated using the digital system and these are forwarded on to the child's next school along with a letter requesting feedback. Individual summaries of a child's progress are also prepared for parents when their child leaves the nursery. These are well-designed reports which clearly show the child's progress in each area of learning and development. They also include sections for the child's comments to be incorporated, which endorses the setting's Montessori commitment to the unique child.

Staff: qualifications, deployment, and performance management

The organisational structure of Oaklea Montessori is very robust; the proprietor and the manager have worked closely together for many years. Rigorous classroom and outdoor procedures have been developed and work very effectively to ensure children are continually engaged and not interrupted in their work. One adult takes on the role of 'facilitator', who prepares the class and has responsibility for maintaining the environment, whilst another carries out presentations or planned activities and a third adult is the 'observer' who records observations. This system appears to work very effectively with this small team.

There are robust recruitment, induction and training procedures in place which emphasise the importance of adhering to Montessori principles and of following the excellent positive language policy. The documentation to support these procedures is the same across the three settings within the group and staff members occasionally

cover at the other nurseries; this offers the opportunity to share good practice. Job descriptions and staff information also link to Montessori practices.

The manager has over 15 years' experience working in a Montessori environment and is very effectively supported by the deputy, who is also qualified to Level 4, and by two other qualified staff members, all of whom have been working within the group of nurseries for over four years. A fifth member of the team is studying for a Montessori Foundation Degree.

It is recommended that the management team start to consider how records of staff supervisions, peer to peer observations and appraisals may be used more effectively to review staff performance and to plan for continued professional development.

Under the highly organised and strong leadership of the manager, members of this small staff team demonstrate commitment to their roles and responsibilities and are entrusted in their work. Their dedication to the Montessori principles of 'following the child' and to continually striving to improve the quality of learning opportunities ensures that their Montessori principles are very firmly fostered at Oaklea.

Name of Assessor: Carolyn O J McNeill

Date report submitted: First visit – 13th September 2016

Second visit – 9th December 2016