



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" (2012/14). 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.

Flitch Green Montessori Pre-school

Tanton Road, Flitch Green, Dunmow, Essex CM6 3GG

Date of previous MEAB accreditation: June 2012

Date of first re-accreditation visit: 30 April 2015

Date of second re-accreditation visit: 14 October 2015

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

Description of the Pre-school

Flitch Green Montessori Pre-school opened in 2009 and is one of a group of five Montessori early years settings. It moved to its present, purpose-built premises in September 2011, located in the grounds of Flitch Green Academy (a primary school) in the village of Flitch Green. The classroom has a carpeted area and a solid floor area with children's sinks. A staff kitchen, reception, toilet facilities, office and a designated outside space for the nursery's children make up the rest of the premises. The children are also able to access the primary school's playground and adjacent field when the school children are not using them.

The pre-school is open term time only, Monday to Friday and runs morning and afternoon sessions. The morning session runs from 08.50 to 12.50 and the afternoon session continues until 15.20, with some children coming in at 12.20. There are currently 45 children aged between 2 and 5 years on the roll. On the day of the second visit 23 attended in the morning and 22 in the afternoon, with four joining just for the afternoon session. Most of the children stay all day.



The pre-school is run as a charity; the principal runs the pre-school in conjunction with a board of trustees. She is in regular attendance (but not included on the staff rota). The appointed manager is responsible for the day to day running of the setting and works full time. One other member of staff is full time and five work part time. Five members of staff worked all day during the second re-accreditation visit. The principal holds a Montessori diploma together with a degree in Childhood and Youth Studies and Early Years Professional Status (EYPS). The manager holds a Montessori diploma and a Foundation Degree in Early Years. This is a well-qualified team, with the majority of staff holding a Montessori qualification and the setting supports Montessori teaching practice students.

Flitch Green Montessori makes provision for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities, 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 children that stay all day can bring their own lunch from home or have a cooked meal which is prepared at the adjacent school and served in the nursery.

Summary

Flitch Green Montessori provides opportunities for children to find their own ways to create and develop their ideas in a nurturing environment. The daily routines are flexible and give time for the children to become deeply involved in activities. The adults provide a caring environment in which each child is valued and respected as a unique individual. The purpose-built premises are light and staff make it welcoming; the outside area is also exceptionally well prepared and covers all curriculum areas.

The team show great care and consideration towards the children; they encourage independence and give the children a sense of responsibility and self-discipline. Respect for the environment is of paramount importance and the mixed age range contributes favourably to the learning and behaviour of all the children in the pre-school. The children have access to a high quality early years curriculum, which includes Montessori materials and activities as well as other well-chosen resources.

Flitch Green pre-school has fully met the recommendation from the last MEAB accreditation by continuing to adapt and develop the outside space, which now includes a well-planned outdoor classroom. In following the recommendations from the first re-accreditation visit the pre-school has introduced a well-resourced and interesting nature table, collated more of the children's own work within their progress records, and opportunities for staff to observe practice across the group of nurseries have been discussed and are set to take place later in the academic year. Teamwork is one of the outstanding features of this pre-school.

Strong partnerships are built with the parents to ensure that the needs of the children are met appropriately and the use of the web-based record keeping system,



which both the staff and parents can contribute to, helps keep all those involved in the children's care well informed and up to date.

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

Philosophy:

Flitch Green Montessori provides a stimulating learning environment and a vibrant and happy atmosphere; it offers an outstanding range of materials that covers the extensive Montessori curriculum. The pre-school aims to create a non-competitive environment that encourages concentration, independence and self-motivation where children are able to reach their full potential. Each child is treated as an individual and the holistic approach and broad provision cater for all areas of the child's learning and development, within a structured framework in line with Montessori philosophy.

The managers from the whole group get together regularly to discuss their principles, aims and philosophy. There is a clear mission statement that conveys the aims and objectives of Flitch Green Montessori; this can be found on the pre-school's website and in its handbook, a copy of which is kept in the entrance hall alongside information about Montessori principles and the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) themes, as well as local community events.

Partnership with the parents is excellent as the pre-school operates an open door policy and offers regular verbal and digital communication. The parents feel well informed and up to date with their children's daily routines as they have access to their child's web-based records. Literature and information about Montessori education is available on the website, in the prospectus, at parent meetings as well as via the web-based recording system.

Learning and Development:

The children's learning opportunities are organized and structured in line with the Montessori early years curriculum and these are linked successfully, through use of the recently introduced and secure web-based system, with the EYFS areas of learning and development. Children's access to this curriculum is supported by topic work, opportunities for using the wide range of materials, and by the outdoor provision. The seven EYFS areas of learning are covered comprehensively. On the day of the second re-accreditation visit activities were themed around 'autumn'.



Long term planning documents the continuous provision and ensures that all areas of the Montessori curriculum are linked to the EYFS aspects. Medium and short term plans are used to respond directly to the needs of the children. The managers of all five settings in the group hold monthly planning meetings, which also include review of practice in relation to Montessori philosophy. Although some of the planning is done collectively within the setting and group of nurseries, care is taken to reflect the needs of all the children and emphasis is put on planning for the individual child.

The carefully prepared learning environment is set up appropriately to meet the developmental needs of children across the age range. The classroom is divided into the Montessori areas of learning. The outside area has a well-resourced outdoor classroom that also covers all areas of learning and has ample space for children to develop their physical skills, as well as providing opportunities for children to find their own ways to represent and develop their ideas. On the day of the first re-accreditation visit a girl was in the sand pit making 'strawberry muffins'.

Each child is allocated a key person who generally works on the same days that they attend. All members of the staff team observe all the children, but it is the child's key person who is responsible for making observations throughout the day and recording them on the digital record keeping system, which automatically links an activity to EYFS areas of learning. The setting also uses a paper-based system to complement the digital recording. This is a comprehensive system and ensures that all the staff can keep up to date with the children's progress and plan next steps. Following the first re-accreditation visit, more evidence of the children's own work that illustrates their progress has been included in the child's paper-based 'My Montessori book'.

All the staff recognize the importance of working co-operatively with other professionals involved in the care and development of the children. The staff team is able to support children with learning difficulties and EAL well; they involve outside agencies when necessary, and have achieved a bronze award for being an autism friendly setting, awarded by Good Beginnings.

Prepared Environment: resources and materials

The purpose built pre-school is light, with a very welcoming atmosphere. The classroom is fully equipped to provide high quality learning opportunities for the children attending. The layout within the room is good and the materials are placed on the shelves in clearly defined areas and are prepared in accordance with the Montessori approach. The resources are regularly changed in order to engage the children's interest. The shelves are well organized and clean and the activities are age appropriate, ready for use, complete and appealing.

As well as the Montessori curriculum areas, the room has a building block section, a book corner, a quiet area and a snack table. The craft area is very well resourced. Two



child-level sinks are well used by the children. During both re-accreditation visits natural materials and flowers were in evidence around the room. Following the recommendation from the first visit, an interesting and well-resourced nature table has also been installed to bring more of the outside environment inside and consolidate the natural materials that were already there into one designated place. Due to the type of materials on offer, the nature table has proved very popular with the children. They can use the materials independently or with guidance from a member of staff.

Excellent use is made of the small reception area for a variety of small group activities, which preserves the quiet and calm atmosphere in the main classroom.

The classroom has direct access to the pre-school's outside area which, on the day of both re-accreditation visits, was very popular with the children. This hard-surfaced area is largely covered by a shelter and has low-level shelving, containing some Montessori materials, puzzles and outdoor equipment such as bats and balls and an arts and craft area. Since the previous MEAB accreditation staff have successfully re-designed the outdoor environment to include activities that fully reflect and complement those indoors. A shed contains bikes, scooters and toy pushchairs which the children can access themselves. When the shed is empty they use it as a reading room. The children are able to help look after a guinea pig who makes a delightful addition to the learning environment. The children also enjoy feeding and watching two chickens, and have named them Olaf and Elsa. A planting area, slide and huge sand pit are also available, as well as a willow hide which is used as a book corner, and a popular 'fairy garden'.

Staff create an environment, both inside and out, that is calm and fosters cooperative learning.

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

The children at Flich Green pre-school have plenty of time and encouragement to develop independence and follow established routines during their time at nursery. Responsibility for themselves, respect for the environment, and the children's ready response to the expectations of those who work with them is very much in evidence. Children are given time to complete their cycles of activity and they are encouraged to look after their own needs with adult support. The team promotes respect by effective role modeling and the use of positive language. The children are learning the difference between right and wrong and the staff are respectful of the children and of the Montessori ethos; they understand the merits of a mixed age range for the promotion of support and respect for others. Children have the choice whether to work individually or participate in small group activities and attendance at circle time at the end of each session is voluntary.

The children are free to work with any member of staff, wherever they choose, and new activities are introduced to encourage learning both inside the classroom and outside in



the garden. On the day of the first re-accreditation visit the majority of the children preferred to learn outside.

Currently the work cycle is just under three hours long in the morning and about 2¾ hours in the afternoon, giving the children plenty of time to work at their own pace both inside and out. The snack is available for the children throughout each session and, whilst it is an independent activity, a member of staff monitors its use.

Lunch is a very social occasion and the children help prepare the tables and crockery. The children are encouraged to tidy up after lunch: they clear away the plates, sweep and wash up. During the summer term children moving to the primary school have lunch in the main school hall to make their transition easier.

The parents spoken to on both re-accreditation visits fully engage with the informative website and feel confident to use the Montessori approach to aid independent learning at home.

Montessori practice: Classroom management

There are two uninterrupted work cycles each day. The 2¾ hour morning work cycle begins as soon as the children arrive. They are greeted by a member of staff and choose their activity after self-registering. During both re-accreditation visits there is free flow movement between the indoor and outside environments, with members of staff sharing the responsibility of being outside. Staff plan activities that meet the learning needs of the children in their care and the appropriate length of both of the daily work cycles offers the children plenty of time to have the opportunity to engage with activities and materials spontaneously, either on their own, with an adult or with friends. The length of the afternoon work cycle is determined by how long children take to have their lunch but it can be up to 2½ hours.

The well-embedded system of accessing snack individually helps ensure that the children are not interrupted during the work cycle. Most parents opt for their children to bring in a packed lunch, although a cooked meal can be provided via the primary school. China plates have recently been made available for the children who bring their own packed meal, which has improved the lunch experience for them. Staff sit with the children to eat. The quiet corner is used as an area for the children to sleep should they need to.

Adult-initiated activities such as project work and science experiments are offered throughout the day and children are free to choose to participate or not. As one member of staff has a degree in the performing arts, activities such as music and dance are offered to the children in spontaneous groups, with the children choosing to join or not. At the end of the morning and afternoon work cycles children are encouraged to participate in the adult-led circle time but this activity is not compulsory. Provision is made for those children who may not be ready to join in, such as if they are engrossed in an activity.



Classroom management is efficient and effective. Daily checks are embedded in the routine practice and before the outside area is made available in the morning an adult checks it with the help of a child.

Montessori Practice: links with parents, including reports and records

The staff at Flitch Green Montessori are excellent at promoting partnership with parents. They have an open door policy and welcome the parents into the classroom at the beginning of each session for discussions with the child's key person or any member of staff. They also share information on the parent page of the web-based recording system and through regular emails and termly newsletters.

Two parent consultation evenings are offered each year and staff have also introduced 'open weeks' where the parents and carers can spend time in the classroom. The parents are given a questionnaire at the end of these visits for feedback. Staff actively encourage parents and family members to come to the setting at any time to share their skills or knowledge with the children. They organise regular family events throughout the year such as outings, Fathers and Mothers weeks and concerts. The parents notice board offers comprehensive information about the setting and other useful agencies such as the local children's centre. The relationship that teachers have with the parents is an outstanding feature of this pre-school.

The combination of the digital records, which include mandatory 2 year old progress checks, along with the 'My Montessori books', narrative observations, photographs and samples of work, and the parents' contributions to their child's records, together ensure that Flitch Green Montessori has an excellent planning, recording and assessment procedure fully in place. This supports the children's continued development at their own rate enabling them to make significant progress. It was recommended during the first re-accreditation visit that the children could contribute to their record keeping by including more of their own work in their 'My Montessori book', which now they do. This provides them with a very meaningful and comprehensive visual record of their progress.

Teachers from their next school are invited to visit the children in the pre-school before they leave. A transition document that is provided by the local authority is completed and this offers a comprehensive assessment of leavers' progress.

Staffing:

The board of trustees has responsibility for agreeing the budget for major items of equipment purchase. There is a well-organized staffing structure in place and, while the principal has overall responsibility for the setting, she recognizes her staff's individual skills; she delegates roles and encourages development of leadership qualities. She



demonstrates a profound commitment to the nursery and works hard to further develop the existing good practice throughout the group of five pre-schools. The principal holds a full Montessori diploma, a BA (Hons) in Childhood and Youth Studies and has EYPS. The manager is also well qualified, with NVQ Level 3 in Early Years Care and Education, a Level 4 Montessori qualification and a Foundation Degree in Early Years. Two further members of staff have a Montessori diploma, one a Montessori certificate qualification and one has a CACHE childcare qualification. The staff support trainee Montessori teachers. Two of the team and a volunteer are working towards Montessori diploma Level 4 and currently one student is in attendance who is working towards a Montessori degree.

The team at Fritch Green has minuted monthly staff meetings as well as informal discussions at the end of each day. All staff members are encouraged to attend in-house training days and continued professional development (CPD) courses. Training is extensive and is often shared with the other pre-schools in the group. During the first re-accreditation visit a member of staff talked about her experience of a course on the importance of giving children real choices in adult-led learning opportunities, which has had a positive impact on her style of teaching. The breadth and quality of the training undertaken by staff highlight CPD as one of the outstanding features of this pre-school.

While the managers visit other pre-schools in the group, it was recommended at the first re-accreditation visit that this unique opportunity is shared with all the staff to further promote good practice. Following discussions with the teams from the other pre-schools, the Fritch Green staff team plan to start these visits later in the academic year. Each new member of the team has an induction programme that covers both the policies and the procedures of the setting. They are also given a comprehensive handbook and a job description.

The managers of all the settings in the group work together, which contributes to the richness of practice and promotes sharing of ideas. They draw up and regularly review a development plan. The staff are observed and supported effectively by the principal and the management's commitment to the employment of qualified Montessori practitioners makes a significant contribution to the quality of early years practice delivered by this successful pre-school.

Name of Assessor: Charlotte White

Date report submitted: First visit – 3 May 2015

Second visit – 16 October 2015