



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.

Merrydays Montessori Nursery School and Henley Montessori Primary School

Memorial Hall, Station Road, Henley-in-Arden, Warwickshire B95 5JP

Date of previous MEAB accreditation: November 2012

Date of first re-accreditation visit: September 18 2015

Date of second re-accreditation visit: January 14 2016

This accreditation report relates to the provision for children aged 2 to 11 years

Description of the school/nursery:

Merrydays Montessori Nursery School and Henley Montessori Primary School are located together within shared community premises in the small town of Henley-in-Arden. They have sole use of the premises during their opening hours and pack equipment away daily. The Nursery School was first registered under the current owner in September 2000 and the Primary School in September 2007.

Inside, there is an entrance lobby and children's cloakroom/toilets, a large hall (with storage space) and a kitchen which overlooks an adjacent room. This room leads to a small entrance lobby that offers access to the outside play area; parents/carers use this side entrance when collecting children at the end of their session. Adjoining this lobby are two further rooms. There are additional toilet and cloakroom facilities and a small office adjacent to one of these rooms. Outside, there is a gated tarmac driveway which leads to an enclosed garden area with shrubs, bark chippings and resources for a range of nature study and creative activities.



Both the Nursery and the School are open term time only, with a maximum of 60 children between the ages of 2 and 11 years attending at any one time. There are currently 39 children on roll, of whom 32 were present on the morning of the second re-accreditation visit and 17 remained for the afternoon. The Nursery School is organized into two groups. The Nursery Class (for 2 year olds) is based in the hall whilst the Pre-School Class (for 3 and 4 year olds) is based in two of the other rooms. The Primary School (which accepts children from 4 to 11 years) also has a dedicated classroom. All the age groups use the hall for activities such as P.E. and music, and for both snack and lunch.

Session times for children attending the Primary School are from 08.45 to 15.15, whilst times for children attending the Nursery and Pre-School are from 09.15 to 12.15 and from 13.15 to 15.15. Children who stay during the lunch period, from 12.15 to 13.15, bring a packed lunch; this food can be heated up on the premises. No children arrive solely to attend afternoon sessions, during which mainly group activities such as music, dance, cooking and P.E. take place. Pre-School and Primary School children who attend on a Tuesday morning all participate in off-site Forest School sessions.

There are four full time members of staff, including the Head who is also the owner. There are seven other members of staff and a SENCo who supports children with additional needs. Eight members of staff have Montessori qualifications and two are qualified teachers. The Head, who has Early Years Professional Status, and one other member of staff are trained Forest School Leaders. The setting provides professional placement support to adults wishing to train as Montessori teachers.

Summary

Montessori principles are clearly evident within the daily practice at Merrydays and Henley. Children are treated with courtesy and respect by adults and they treat their peers with equal consideration. Visual displays and written information emphasise the aims and benefits of the Montessori approach to education. Children's independence and self-confidence is fostered through their freedom to choose activities and to complete their cycles of activity, with observant adults offering help where it is needed.

The beautifully prepared and maintained resources in all the classrooms support children's learning and development. Rooms are clean, bright, spacious and attractive. There is ample room for children to choose where they want to work, whether on the floor, at tables or outside. Outdoor resources are well-planned and provide for all areas of learning.

Staff members regularly review their practice. They work closely with other professionals and are committed to continuing professional development. They have built on the recommendations from the previous MEAB accreditation. For example, children's individual Learning Journals have been developed to better track their progress and to improve partnerships with parents, although the recording process



does not yet clearly link Montessori activities to the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) areas of learning and development or the National Curriculum. Since the first re-accreditation visit, procedures for staff supervision have been successfully implemented. These now form an essential part of the school's existing Performance Management Structure, contributing to the identification of areas for continuing professional development. Links with parents have also been reviewed and a weekly update has been introduced. This provides information about planned events, in addition to giving parents tips on how to support their child's learning at home, for example by focusing on ways to encourage children's independence.

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 embed the weekly planning system for children in the Primary School, so that it fully reflects children's individual goals and encourages them to take ownership of their learning; and
- continue to develop children's Learning Journals, clearly linking the Montessori and EYFS or National Curriculum areas of learning, and further encourage parents to contribute to these records.

Philosophy:

The commitment of all the staff at Merrydays and Henley to preparing a rich learning environment in keeping with Montessori philosophy is clearly evident. The setting's Mission Statement is displayed in the entrance lobby and there is a very attractive and informative banner displayed in the large hall, which is the main classroom for the 2 year olds. The setting's goals and philosophy are reviewed during half-termly staff meetings and any changes are recorded by the Head.

Resources for all curriculum areas are exceptionally well-maintained and readily accessible on low shelves throughout each room, with even the youngest children being supported to complete their cycles of activity independently. Free flow between the indoor and outdoor learning areas within the Nursery School is well established and allows the adults to 'follow the child' with a nurturing ethos.

Adults are very good role models and encourage children's practical understanding of 'freedom within limits', so that boundaries for expected behaviour are understood and followed. For example, on the day of the second re-accreditation visit, staff members were seen to support with great patience and sensitivity a child who needed help. Children handle materials with care; they interact with both adults and peers in a courteous and respectful manner, taking turns and waiting for the item they want to use



to become available. Children demonstrate real enthusiasm for learning, for example showing an adult in the garden the 'wiggly worm' they have just found or proudly exclaiming that they have managed to unscrew the nut on a vice, or complete a complicated string bead pattern indoors.

Adults working in the Primary School show clear understanding of the Montessori approach to learning for the older children. Vertical age grouping is maintained here and children continue to be self-directed, albeit within a structure more defined by the primary curriculum.

Learning and Development:

Staff understand the requirements of the EYFS areas of learning and link these to planning using the Montessori curriculum for those in the Nursery School. The individual Learning Journals, which have been established since the last MEAB accreditation, provide an accurate record of children's progress across both EYFS and Montessori areas of learning, although separate records are maintained for each. These Journals are shared positively with parents. Merrydays follows guidance from Warwickshire Local Authority, which suggests that children who have not had the mandatory two year old progress check prior to joining a setting should be assessed within the first month of starting. Children's key persons are responsible for completing this report and for sharing it with parents and they liaise with health visitors where there are concerns regarding a child's developmental progress. Merrydays also follows Warwickshire's guidance with regard to records for children who leave the setting. A 'Tracker' is prepared which details children's progress within the EYFS developmental guidelines and this is forwarded to the new setting/school. The SENCo at Merrydays and Henley works very closely with the Head, with the staff team and with outside agencies, to give early support to children who are at risk of developmental delay.

The Montessori primary curriculum offered at Henley supports all aspects of learning within the National Curriculum; the children do not undertake its SAT tests. The Learning Journals which are begun when children join are carried through when children move up within the setting. Since the first re-accreditation visit, children in the Primary School have begun to take responsibility for their weekly planning but they would benefit from more support in identifying personal learning goals for the week. The Reception children in particular could be encouraged to do this by initially planning daily activities, which they review at the end of each day before planning for the next day.

The outdoor space supports learning across the curriculum for the whole age range. Paintbrushes, buckets, the mud kitchen and small world activities provide opportunities for children's creative development. There are ample resources for physical development and lots of opportunities for language learning linked to knowledge and understanding of the world, such as children and adults looking for woodlice and worms. In addition to the clearly labelled activities for numeracy, well-chosen equipment such as large foam dominoes support problem solving and counting.



The adults support children of all ages sensitively and respectfully during the three hour work cycle in the morning, with children's movement from indoors to outdoors appearing seamless. Adults observe and position themselves where they can best enhance children's learning. This was evident during both re-accreditation visits. For example, when three children wanted to go outside, their teacher said she would go and get her coat whilst they got theirs and, on noticing that some children were returning indoors after a period in the garden, two members of staff followed, one of whom stayed in a Pre-School room and engaged a small group of children in a sorting activity, whilst the other went into the large hall with a small group of children who then chose some gluing and sticking activities. Across this hall, other children were already in the snack area, independently choosing what they wanted to eat, pouring their own drinks and clearing away when they had finished.

Prepared Environment: resources and materials

The large hall is used as the base room for the 2 year olds (Nursery Class); for activities of everyday living; for craft and creative activities; and for all children (including those in the Primary School) to access snack and lunch provision. It is exceptionally well resourced, with a wide range of materials which are readily accessible on low shelves or tables. This arrangement provides an excellent opportunity for the youngest children to be introduced to the materials and to the cycle of activity. Since the first re-accreditation visit glasses have been provided in place of plastic cups for use during snack time, which promotes children's independence and engagement with real objects.

The two rooms adjoining the small lobby provide a base for the 3 and 4 year olds (Pre-School), although there are opportunities for free flow between these rooms and the hall. In the first of these rooms, later activities of everyday living, cultural materials and some sensorial activities are the focus. Resources – many of which have been made by the staff team – are extremely well prepared and beautifully maintained, inviting children to use them. In the second room, later sensorial materials sit alongside Montessori mathematics and literacy materials and a lovely display on the nature table. All are easily accessible on low shelves. There is a small carpeted book area. During the second re-accreditation visit, this room was being well used – initially by the Primary children engaged in 'brain gym' and later by the Pre-School children for a range of both individual and group activities.

The Primary School classroom has a wide range of resources to support learning and development in line with both the National Curriculum and the Montessori primary curriculum. On the day of the first visit, The Story of Writing was displayed, as were resources for geography, history, science exploration, literacy and mathematics. The Pre-School children are also able to access the cultural resources available on low shelving within the Primary classroom. On the second re-accreditation visit there was a beautiful display of children's art, based on the works of author Eric Carle. French, music, dance and P.E. are taught by specialist teachers.



Outside, well maintained and accessible resources provide opportunities for all areas of learning. For example, both gross and fine motor development is supported through the use of ride-on toys and balancing equipment, paintbrushes, 'grabbers' and small pieces of wood used for writing in the sand box. Mathematics is supported not only by having numerals on display, but also through having containers for sorting natural materials and for emptying and filling, thereby learning about weight, space and measure. Literacy development is encouraged with the clear labelling of the outdoor resources and with materials for mark-making. The nature garden is an excellent resource for the children to learn about the natural environment, insects, birds, sounds and colours.

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

Every aspect of Merrydays and Henley supports the development of children's increasing independence and the self-esteem that goes with it. This is evident in the self-confidence shown by even the youngest children as they move around the setting, from indoors to outdoors and vice versa. Children freely choose their activities and are able to complete numerous cycles of activity throughout the morning.

Adults are observant and skillful in knowing when to offer help and when to give the child space to 'have a go' by themselves. Adults ask 'would you like me to help you?' On the day of the first re-accreditation visit children frequently chose to do an activity on their own, sometimes drawing the attention of an adult when they had proudly completed it. If they needed help they were confident in asking for it. Children were observed on several occasions wanting to join an activity which involved other children and they joined without disrupting others in the group or the adult's presentation. Children are encouraged to manage their toileting independently, but given help when needed.

Although the first re-accreditation visit occurred very early in the autumn term, even the youngest children were able to choose when they wanted to access the snack table. They collected their cup and plate, chose what they wanted to eat and where they wanted to sit, clearing away when they had finished. Older children helped younger children, for example, to reach the board to put their name card on after they had eaten snack.

The Head, supported by her staff team, ensures parents have lots of information about how to support their child's growing independence and how this contributes to the progress of their child's overall development. The team constantly reviews ways of continuing to engage parents in this very concrete way of supporting their child's learning and, since the first re-accreditation visit, parents have received regular updates focusing on the ways in which they can support their child's independence at home.



Montessori practice: Classroom management

Learning opportunities are skillfully managed, with staff strategically placed from the time of children's arrival to the point at which they are collected, either at the end of the morning session or at 15.15. This means that from the outset children are directed calmly and purposefully. Parents who need to exchange information with staff can do so without distractions. Children who need support separating from parents on arrival have a sensitive and sympathetic adult swiftly to hand. This was particularly evident on the day of the second re-accreditation visit, when a child who was reluctant to join in, became interested in the song an adult was singing with the use of finger puppets. The adult was gradually able to draw the child in and, by the end of the morning the child was clearly happy and at ease. Additionally, use of the Daily Book (home school diary) – which informs staff of any particular issue, plan, comment, observation or feedback relevant to the day – helps ensure that all staff work well together as a team.

Staff deployment in terms of key children and base classrooms is clear. All staff members engage with children across the age range at varying times of the day and this often depends on when children choose to go outside, have snack or do a particular activity. In the nursery, records of the activities children have been introduced to and their progress towards being able to complete them are set out, both as a guide to planning and as a swift means of maintaining up to date records. Staff members are therefore quickly able to work appropriately with individual children, whether or not they are that particular child's key person. This works slightly differently for the Primary School, where planned activities for the coming week are agreed between the Head and the children.

All children eat lunch together in the hall. They collect and manage their packed lunch independently, alongside staff members who are available to give support when needed. A quiet, carpeted room with mattresses and blankets is available for any children who need to sleep.

Group activities are offered during the afternoon. When Forest School sessions take place, parents drop their children at the Forest School location, which is a short distance from the setting, and the children walk back to the setting for lunch.

The extended work cycle in the morning, the high adult to child ratio, the commitment to free flow and the vertical age grouping that this leads to, together with the highly experienced staff, all result in exceptionally good classroom management throughout the setting, which enormously benefits the children.

Montessori Practice: links with parents, including reports and records

During both re-accreditation visits, parents reported that they were overwhelmingly delighted with the progress their children had made and continue to make at Merrydays and Henley. They felt that the provision was outstanding and that they could see the



positive impact the daily routines had had on their children, for example, by tidying up after themselves.

Staff feel that the introduction of Learning Journals in both the Nursery and the Primary School has been very successful in terms of providing feedback to parents about their children's progress. Through these Journals, parents have a platform to add their own contribution to their child's records by providing information from home. The staff team hopes to build on this reciprocal communication, particularly in terms of highlighting the links between the Montessori curriculum and the EYFS areas of learning or National Curriculum, so that parents have a better understanding of how the setting provides for all areas of learning and development. The mandatory progress checks for two year olds also provide parents of children who join at this age with an opportunity to speak to their child's key person and to get some early feedback on how their child has settled into the Nursery School.

A wealth of information about the setting and about the Montessori approach is available to parents on the setting's website. In addition, the Welcome Pack which parents are given when their child registers includes information about the EYFS. At different times throughout the year, events such as open days, sports days and 'Montessori Child for a Day', are organised. These give parents an opportunity to share in the "thriving community" (as one parent described it) which is Merrydays and Henley. The 'Friends of Merrydays' meet monthly, primarily as a forum for fundraising for the setting.

The Head and her team regularly review their partnerships with parents and acknowledge that continuing to work together is essential for the benefit of the child.

Since the first re-accreditation visit, a newsletter has gone out reminding parents of essential information, including how they can help support their child's growing independence, and the weekly update with short tips has been very well received.

Staffing:

Merrydays and Henley benefits from the strong leadership, enthusiasm and commitment of the Head and her Deputy, who is a qualified teacher. They ensure that job descriptions are clear, that induction is thorough and that the day to day working environment reflects the Montessori ethos in a relaxed, informal way. As a result, the majority of the staff team has worked at the setting for many years, providing stability, continuity and loyalty, which is greatly appreciated by the parents who send their children to the setting year on year.

Furthermore, the determination to maintain the high standards established over the years is supported by a clear performance management structure, which includes peer observations and appraisals. The introduction of a clearly defined framework for staff supervision since the first re-accreditation visit has enhanced this already very strong



aspect of the setting's practice. Together, these are contributing to the identification and support of areas for continued professional development. This is of enormous benefit to the children, as the staff put fresh ideas into practice. For example, in addition to training offered by the local authority, the staff team regularly attends national conferences and Montessori regional networking meetings. As a team, they are highly qualified and experienced, and they bring this expertise into their everyday interactions with the children.

Name of Assessor: Maureen Taylor

Date report submitted: First visit – Sept 22nd 2015

Second visit – Jan 18th 2016