



August 2014

Dear Parents

We hope you are having a lovely summer and looking forward to returning on Tuesday 3 September. This term we will be welcoming Aaron, Curtis, Freya, George, George, Harry, Jack, Levi, Maddie, Oliver, Paige, Samuel, Skyy, Syun and Zoe. We hope they enjoy their time with us. It has been an exciting year for us so far, especially having received Montessori accreditation and we will continue to work hard to maintain the standards required.

Sound and Number of the Week

We will start again at Aa and number 1. Please encourage your child to bring in items beginning with the sound of the week.

Themes

Week 1 Settling in

- 2 All about me
- 3 Colours
- 4 The Farmyard
- 5 Transport
- 6 Shapes
- 7 Autumn (including Divali)

Emailing and Facebook

Following our recent questionnaire, we are taking heed of the suggestion that we join the 21st century and email newsletters and any other communications! This should

ensure that everyone is kept informed and avoid delay. Please let us know any changes to email addresses so that we can keep our database up-to-date.

We have also set up our very own Facebook page (Sunflower Montessori Kindergarten Hutton) where we will post photos of our activities. Please let us know if you DO NOT want your child to be included in any pictures for this site.

Government Funding

As you are probably aware, children aged 3 and over (for the autumn term, this will be children born on or before 31 August 2011) are entitled to up to 15 hours of free education. All of those eligible have been given a form to complete on which you are asked to state how many hours you will be claiming. Please note that we are required to confirm these hours with Essex County Council shortly after the term begins and once this has been done, we are unable to increase them until the next term. So if you have claimed for less than your entitlement but think you may wish to add more, please let us know. We have tried to persuade the council to be sympathetic in the past, but they are very tough and have never given in!

Labels, Supplies etc

Please could all clothing, drink cups, lunch bags etc. be clearly labelled? Children should bring in a change of clothing; hats and sun cream in the summer; hats, gloves and wellies in the winter; and indoor shoes. Additionally, those in nappies should provide nappies, wipes and nappy bags please.

Additional events

Over the last year, we have had a Christmas event with face painting, an Easter Egg hunt and a summer party with Mr Popcorn, all free of charge. Unfortunately we will be unable to continue to cover all the costs of such events and will be asking for a small contribution in the future.

Questionnaire Feedback

We were delighted with the overwhelmingly positive responses to our annual questionnaire. Thank you to all of you who took the time to complete them. We are always happy to read your suggestions to improve the nursery and this year have taken on board the suggestion to email newsletters. This round-up helps us greatly, but please feel free to let us know any ideas you have at any time.

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 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.

Sunflower Montessori Kindergarten

Lansbury Suite, Poplar Hall, Poplar Drive, Hutton, Brentwood, Essex CM13 1YU

Date of first accreditation visit: 10 June 2013

Date of second accreditation visit: 11 December 2013

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

Description of the school

Sunflower Montessori Kindergarten was established in 2005 by the current owner and is based in the Poplar Community Hall in the village of Hutton, near Shenfield. The surrounding area is residential with large areas of green common land. During its opening hours the school has sole use of a large, L-shaped room which can be divided into two smaller rooms using a sliding screen. All of the children are based in this room. Other organisations use the room when the school is not in operation and this means that the equipment and furniture have to be packed away periodically. The front door is accessed by a ramp, providing wheelchair access. There are two toilets for children’s use and separate facilities for the adults and those with disabilities. The school also has access to a large kitchen and a large hall for children to play in during inclement weather. The setting does not have a dedicated outdoor area; however, it is adjacent to a large grassed area and woodland.

Sunflower Montessori Kindergarten is a term-time setting which offers morning sessions from 9.00 to 13.00 five days a week, and afternoon sessions from 13.00 to 15.00 from Monday to Wednesday. Children who are not staying for lunch leave at 12.00 and those children staying until 13.00 or 15.00 bring a packed lunch, which is eaten at the classroom tables. The school can accommodate 26 children and there are currently 32 children on roll, of whom eight are under 3 years of age. On the day of the second visit there were 12 children present for the morning session and six children present for the afternoon session. The school makes provision for children with special educational needs (SEN) and English as an additional language (EAL), with the manager having received Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCo) training. The children have access to a comfortable book corner and additional cushions if they need to rest.

The manager has worked at the setting for some years and holds an NVQ level 3 in Early Years Education, she is currently undertaking Montessori training. Of the four other staff members employed, all hold appropriate early years qualifications. The owner, who provides additional teaching support, also has a Montessori international diploma. The manager works from Monday to Thursday and all other staff are also part-time.

Summary

Sunflower Montessori School has a good reputation among local families, many of whom have sent all of their children to the school. Several of the staff have been with the school for some time and they are enthusiastic about the owner's commitment to the accreditation process as it has provided a means for reflection and improvement. Since the first accreditation visit the staff team have worked hard to implement changes, which have greatly improved the quality of Montessori education for the children who attend.

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 with the development of the system for planning, recording and assessing children's learning in order to show clear links between the Montessori and the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) areas of learning.

- Provide further training for staff to promote consistency across the team in managing children's behaviour and in understanding of Montessori philosophy.
- Extend the good practice at snack time to the lunch period to give children further opportunities to develop their independence.

Philosophy:

The owner and the Montessori trained staff member have a good understanding of Montessori philosophy – of the nature of the child and the role of the adult – and they are conscious of the need to share this with the rest of the staff team and with the families of children attending the setting. Their knowledge is reflected in the setting's goals and principles, which are stated in the prospectus, on the website and in the policy file. All staff are involved in regularly reviewing the school's goals.

Since the first accreditation visit the staff team have undertaken further training and have made significant changes to their practice which have improved the development of focused concentration and self-discipline of the children.

Learning and Development:

Staff undertake long-term planning together for the whole group at the start of the academic year. The Montessori teacher makes a separate plan detailing which Montessori activities will be relevant and these are presented throughout the year to groups of children.

Short term planning is undertaken by key people who plan for their key children using the children's individual Learning Journals. Planning is organised using the EYFS framework and a 'Progress Wheel' helps to assess the effectiveness of learning and development of the provision. All staff observe all children and key people collate the observations and enter them in the children's Learning Journals, supported by photographs and notes linking to the EYFS. The adults know the children well and this is evidenced in the care taken over the Learning Journals. Following recommendations made after the first accreditation visit some changes have been implemented to link the record-keeping and planning to the Montessori curriculum using the child's individual Montessori Learning Plan.

Restructuring of the morning session to include a work-cycle of a minimum of 2½ hours has given

children more time and confidence to become engaged with the activities available. All Montessori areas of learning are present in the classroom, and recent reorganisation of the room has encouraged children to begin to access activities independently.

Prepared Environment: resources and materials

There is a good range of Montessori materials, some of which have been replaced since the first accreditation visit. The materials are organised in areas of learning and are accessible by the children.

There are sufficient materials for the number of children attending and there is enough space for children to use them freely. The Montessori materials are relevant to the developmental needs of the children attending.

On the second visit there was a marked improvement in the level of use of the Montessori materials and in children's concentration; this may be due to the recent changes in the classroom layout which encourages the children to use all of the activities available and to help the adults better maintain the environment. The creative area is well stocked and popular with the children.

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

Since the first visit some changes have been made which make it easier for the staff team to support the children's independence. These include the development of ground rules for the children, and the staff team are working towards consistency in dealing with children's behaviour. The work cycle has been changed to ensure that children have a minimum of 2½ hours of uninterrupted time to work on their chosen activities and this related to the improvement of children's concentration, which was observed during the second visit.

Children can choose to work individually or in different sized groups. A continuous snack table for the duration of the work cycle gives children good opportunities to develop real-life skills and this good

practice should now be extended to lunch time.

As was seen at the first visit, the staff team planned a very interesting topic for the term, which linked in to each family's country of origin (there were 14 countries in total) and provided excellent opportunities for the children to gain respect for other cultures.

Children are able to change their shoes and hang up their coats independently and staff give parents verbal and written ideas about promoting independence at home.

Montessori practice: classroom management

Children are grouped all together, from the age of 2 to 5 years. A timetable is on display showing adults' responsibilities. On the day of the second visit there was one adult-led creative activity and a ten minute morning circle group; otherwise children were free to choose for themselves. They engaged well with the interesting activities on offer. Incorporating stimulating activities that relate to the topic work has helped the children to investigate these independently. Giving children individual presentations rather than group presentations has helped to foster independence by giving them more responsibility for their own learning.

The school does not have access to a secure outdoor space, so children are taken for a walk after the work cycle and before lunch. Because the school is bordered by roads the children hold on to a 'crocodile' rope and are guided by adults. On the day of the second visit the children visited the nearby woodland to make bark-rubbing pictures. After lunch children who are staying for the afternoon session are free to choose their own activities.

Montessori Practice: links with parents, including reports and records

At the beginning of each term, key people plan for each of their key children using the EYFS framework. Each staff member records observations of all children but the key person takes responsibility for

collating and keeping the Learning Journals up to date. Since the first visit the staff team have made changes to the way in which children's observations are recorded; however, the separate recording of Montessori activities still makes it difficult for adults to assess the links in children's learning between the Montessori curriculum and areas of the EYFS and to clearly see progress or areas of need.

Children's Learning Journals are shared with parents at Parents' Evenings twice a year and staff are able to give daily feedback to parents. This, together with daily diaries, ensures that parents are kept well informed about their child's achievements. When children leave Sunflower Montessori Kindergarten a written report is prepared for their next school. Parents are also kept informed through newsletters, and their views are sought through questionnaires. Parents feel that the staff are interested in their children's achievements and value parents' comments on their child's development.

The adults at the school understand what is expected of them through job descriptions and daily rotas which designate responsibility for areas such as lunch supervision and daily checks. The school's policies and procedures were up to date on the second visit.

Staffing:

There are five members of staff in addition to the school's owner. The manager holds a relevant NVQ level 3 and has undertaken SENCo training. She has started Montessori training and works closely with the school's Montessori teacher who has a Montessori international diploma. The remaining three staff hold NVQ level 3 diplomas in Early Years Education. The school owner is Montessori trained and works at the school part-time.

Staff meet regularly and all have job descriptions which are reviewed annually when staff appraisals are held. Each staff member is encouraged to undertake one training course per term, either through the local authority or through the regional Montessori group. A programme of peer observations is due to be introduced in 2014. New staff undergo training in the school's routines on their first day.

The staff team are committed to the development of the school, and recent training has motivated them to work together to achieve consistency in recording, assessment and in managing children's behaviour. The owner and the manager have identified further Montessori training for the staff team as an area for development.

Name of Assessor: Susie Norman

Date of reports: First visit – 14th June 2013

Second visit – 14th December 2013