

Montessori Evaluation and Accreditation Board

School Accreditation

This report follows an accreditation visit made on behalf of the Montessori Evaluation and Accreditation Board. It considers how far the school follows Montessori approaches. 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.

Wharfedale Montessori School

Strid Cottage, Bolton Abbey, Skipton, North Yorks BD23 6AN

Description of the school:

Wharfedale school is situated in an area of outstanding natural beauty and special scientific interest (SSI). The Children's House comprises of two classrooms and square middle hallway. The children have free access all through the ground floor. Outside there is a large woodland and grassed gardens, with a tarmac playground for primary and a small sports field. It has a large tarmac driveway with zebra crossing where ride-on toys are used. The children also have a planting garden and there is climbing equipment on both parts of the site. Hens and cats wander round the garden. Fifty yards away there is a purpose built, newly constructed wooden cabin comprising of a large lobby area and lavatory facilities leading into a beautiful light, well-organised room with a kitchen area and small IT area.

Wharfedale Babies is also situated in an area of outstanding natural beauty and special scientific interest. The nursery is in a period schoolhouse with one large room plus modern fully equipped kitchen and baby change/toilet area and staff cloakroom. They have a little store room/staff room. The whole building has been fully refurbished to a high standard with under floor central heating. Outside there is a large outdoor playground area and a smaller grassed play area at the front. A play-house, sandpit and various ride-on toys are available.

Wharfedale Babies is open from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday to Friday, and is registered 16 children each day; Wharfedale Montessori School is open from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday to Friday, and is registered for 50 children.

Summary and conclusion.

This is unique rural baby unit, nursery and primary school with a wealth of natural outdoor activities within an SSI. Outstandingly resourced with Montessori materials and outdoor activities, it is run by dedicated staff in a carefully structured environment that is warm, welcoming, nurturing, and calm, and fosters independence, confidence and self-esteem, while encouraging the children to make excellent progress in all areas of learning. The behaviour of the children is outstanding.

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, but there could be development in the following areas:

- The children's records should be contributed to by all the staff and should be evaluated
- Staff roles could be shared.

Philosophy:

The philosophy of the school recognises that the aim of Montessori education is to help the natural process of development, giving the children the tools to develop their own potential using a holistic approach

The children are given the skills for learning. The children have extended periods of concentration, are able to repeat and satisfy their sense of order, and have freedom of choice and movement. The children are self motivated and display positive behaviour. They are given opportunities to foster a true love and care for the environment both inside and outside.

The school prospectus provides the parents and staff with the educational principles, goals and philosophy in writing, which take into account the educational environment, the adults' roles and Montessori's description of the nature of the child. The parents are provided with newsletters, educational evenings and relevant articles are displayed on the notice boards. The parents have ample opportunity for receiving information relating to the Montessori approach. However, the prospectus does not use phraseology which would support staff and parents in relating it to the EYFS.

The principles, goals and philosophy are reviewed regularly.

There is a useful checklist which includes daily routines and classroom procedures.

Curriculum:

Long term by year, short term planning is updated regularly, following the Montessori principles and presentations in the work cycle, and term by term reviewing what project work or extra activities they are doing (e.g. school trips, drama productions, swimming days, French lessons and sports activities). The last of these takes place outside the work cycle in the afternoon. The planning and learning progress is constantly monitored by record keeping and discussion and by having a thorough recording system.

The staff are very well informed and follow the children's developmental milestones. Individual records which aid this are in place and are used. The children are treated as individuals and allowed to follow their inner needs and sensitive periods and any child with additional educational needs would be well catered for. Evaluating the records formally would help all staff with assessment and recording of children's

learning and progress. The planning is organised separately in each setting. The quality of the planning in the Children's House is excellent making very effective links between the Montessori method and the Foundation Stage. Staff use the children's records to identify learning priorities. All the staff in the Baby Unit and Children's House contribute to the planning.

The Head of the primary setting plans for the primary class. The planning is broad and based on the Montessori principles. Daily discussions with the children inform the staff allowing them to assess the children's progress and plan their working schedule. Using more of the staff for recording and observing would provide useful feedback and help with tracking the children's progress.

WHARFEDALE BABIES: All the Montessori infant/toddler materials are clearly mapped to Birth to Three Matters. There is a good range of activities which meet the needs of the whole child. Staff 'follow the child' and implement routines flexibly, ensuring that their needs are met. Children are able to spend time outside everyday.

THE CHILDREN'S HOUSE: The school follows the Montessori curriculum and it makes excellent use of the exceptional resources of Montessori materials to promote this. The children learn through an extensive range of activities preparing them for the sensorial, maths, literacy and cultural areas. The quality of the curriculum is excellent and the children are allowed to be active or passive learners. The curriculum is closely linked with the Foundation Stage areas of learning.

THE PRIMARY CABIN: The primary follows the Montessori curriculum and includes geography, history, biology, arts and crafts, physics, chemistry, algebra and geometry as well as mathematics and language, and the use of computers in preparation for their next school. Other subjects such as foreign languages and swimming are provided as an extra and are taken up by many of the pupils. Most of the subjects are covered by specific Montessori materials which allow the children an outstanding degree of independence and control over their learning. Excellent use is made of the surrounding area as a educational tool. Visits are made to places of educational interest to supplement the curriculum.

Cultural development is outstanding and covers a wide range of areas. By taking an active part in their learning the children are truly prepared to be model citizens of the world.

The role of the Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO) is the responsibility of the Head but other staff have had the SENCO training. There is an extensive SENCO policy and individual educational plans are used if appropriate. Staff would be given training for any individual need as it came up. It was suggested that as the school had the resources already that it would be appropriated to display the MAKATON symbols in the Wharfedale Baby Unit to aid language development. The atmosphere is very inclusive. The needs of the children with SEN are met by adaption of presentations and being open to different teaching styles which may be appropriate. Where necessary an Individual Education Plan (IEP) is put in place with simple targets set each term.

Resources and materials:

Ample core materials are present in each class. The school is exceptionally well resourced. The children have independent access to all materials which are relevant and age appropriate. Materials are displayed to entice the children. Materials on the shelves are attractive and the activities are not cramped. The materials are easily assessable on low level shelving and are complete. Natural lighting is provided by windows on all sides in the cabin and baby unit and one side in the Children's House. The decor in the baby unit is calm and all the shelving and floor are wooden and in beautiful condition.

In Wharfedale Babies, the room is divided into active and quiet areas. There is free access into both areas and children move between them with ease. The room is aesthetically very pleasing with low shelving housing a wide range of quality, natural resources for children to access independently.

The Children's House has two well lit rooms and low shelving and there is an area to display the children's art work. The practical life, snack area and creative materials are in one room where there are ample places to sit, while the history, nature table, sensorial materials, language, cultural and maths materials are in the other room. The decor is calm and there is plenty of space for the children to work on the floor. The middle hallway houses the books and community blocks and piano as well as a computer.

The whole setting is very well resourced. There are plenty of appropriate materials to change the resources as necessary.

The primary school is a wonderful purpose-built building with calm decor and suitable shelving. A delicious smell of new wood greets you as you enter.

The primary setting is also very well resourced to cover the Montessori curriculum for this age group. In addition there is an accessible kitchen area, with a dishwasher and cooking facilities. The children are encouraged to use this area independently.

The environment not only promotes excellent academic skills but practical skills as well. The children 'own' their surroundings. There is also a small IT and music area.

The materials in all three settings are relevant and multicultural. They foster the children's needs socially and emotionally. The cultural development is outstanding and covers a wide range of areas. The children are truly prepared by taking an active part to be model citizens of the world. The children are creative, and have opportunities for music, drama, painting, drawing and design and technology.

The materials and resources encourage the children to use their imagination for exploration and questioning, enabling them to learn at their own rate and independently.

Staffing:

All the staff are Montessori trained except one who is NNEB. There is a small staff team of with two co-managers; the third senior member of staff is also well qualified for management level. The three senior staff share most of the planning and management. Six staff have Montessori qualifications and one is currently training for her Montessori Centre International (MCI) Level 2 certificate.

Regular workshops are provided to give the staff an opportunity to deliver excellent practice in Montessori education. The staff provide a wonderful balance of stimulating activities in all areas of learning indoors and outside. The outside area is used extensively and is exceptional. The staff are very flexible and willing and work very well as a team both using their own initiative and due to excellent organisation by the management. The principles of the philosophy underpin the practice very effectively, but there is nominal delegation of responsibility for leadership, observing and evaluating roles.

The process of induction has been recently updated and reviewed. As a lot of the staff have started as students they are very familiar with the settings before they are employed.

The staff job descriptions are currently being reviewed and a formal system for recording the frequency of the review is being implemented. There are informal observations of the staff but as yet no written evidence of staff observations and appraisals, but this is also currently under review. Formal staff meetings are held only once a term thereby missing opportunities to gather all the staff more regularly to discuss, record and evaluate the children's progress on a more formal basis, giving an opportunity to provide them with written evidence and a chance for all staff to contribute towards the pupils' achievements and future needs. All the staff have the opportunity to contribute to the agenda and minutes are taken. Informal discussions take place daily.

The staff are sensitive to the children's needs, interests and sensitive periods and plan activities to support them, following the child and helping only when help is needed and trusting the child. The children's records in the Children's House and at Wharfedale babies are extensive but would benefit from being formally evaluated.

The record keeping in the cabin is primarily the responsibility of the Head. However to promote staff development and help with a broader understanding and recording of the children's progress the setting would benefit from having more of the staff involved in record keeping and evaluating observations.

The staff are aware of the requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) and implement them.

The staff are able to contribute ideas as to how funds should be spent and the school has very supportive parents who do very effective fundraising for large expensive outdoor climbing equipment.

The dietary needs of the children are displayed for all the staff to see on a cupboard where the children eat in Wharfedale babies and in the Children's House. Parents provide the children's lunches in the Children's House and the Cabin.

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

The school provides the foundations for the child's future learning, giving the children a sense of themselves, confidence, self esteem, respect and an interest in people and world around them. It provides a happy environment which allows the children to develop and grow, fulfil their individual potential through freedom of choice and express their characters, whilst behaving in a friendly and considerate

manner towards other children and towards adults. The staff and the older children are excellent role models. They are able to control their own space and take ownership of their environment, cleaning, polishing, and preparing it to a very high standard without being directed by an adult.

The three settings promote a positive attitude, enthusiasm and a sense of achievement in the children which in itself is conducive to independence and learning. The children's independence is excellent, being helped by easily accessible Montessori materials and unlimited time to choose and complete the activities.

There is an interactive engagement between children and loving adults where questions can be listened to and the children given time to express their needs. The children show due regard for the rules of society and the right of their peers to work on the whole undisturbed. An overseeing role would allow the staff to give presentations without being disturbed, so giving the children of uninterrupted learning.

The parents are valued and respected and acknowledged to be the children's primary educators and encouraged to promote their children's independence with evening classes, newsletters and information in the prospectus. A parent pack is provided on enrolment with ideas regarding how parents can bring the Montessori approach into the home and how to prepare the child for coming into school.

Montessori practice: *classroom management*

The work cycle is over two and often nearer three hours in the Children's House. The primary school has a three hour work cycle in the morning.

The records are kept by the key worker in the Children's House and by the head in the primary. The children are grouped vertically within the independent settings. The older children visit the Children's House regularly so share in achievements.

The classrooms are run in such a way that they: promote the children's freedom to make spontaneous choices; to be independent; to complete cycles of work; to develop a sense of responsibility within the group; to use the materials properly; and to work on their own or with others as they like

Montessori practice: *adults' routines, links with parents, including reports and records.*

Discipline is gentle and positive and as a result the children are very secure in their surroundings. The school has an outstandingly effective partnership with parents. The three different settings undertake written observations of the children which inform their assessment, review and planning of the provision. The parents have a choice of either written or verbal reports at the end of the school year, and there is daily verbal communication. Reports for the next school are shared with the parents. There is a clear system covering adults' responsibilities