



Montessori Evaluation and Accreditation Board

School Accreditation

This report is prepared following the accreditation visit 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 report does not address the standards and quality issues which are the responsibility of the Ministry of Social Affairs which reports separately. Also the report does not provide any assessment of financial aspects of the school.

International Montessori Pre-School

Villa 10, In-Between-Two-Bridges, P.O. Box 48371, Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates

Dates of accreditation visit: 22 and 23 February 2016

This accreditation report relates to the provision for children aged 18 months to 6 years.

Description of the nursery:

International Montessori Pre-School was founded in 2005 and is registered for children aged from 18 months to 6 years. The pre-school is privately owned by the principal and is sponsored by an Emirati. It follows the Montessori curriculum and incorporates the areas of learning and development set out in England's Early Years Foundation Stage Framework (EYFS).

The pre-school is located in an urban area of Abu Dhabi and occupies a large, traditional villa. The school building consists of nine classrooms spread over two floors. Each room houses a different curriculum area. On the ground floor there are the sensorial, practical life and role play rooms, along with the Early Years Unit that is specifically for the children under 2½ years of age. The cultural, mathematics, language, Arabic and art rooms are on the first floor. Each classroom has access to an en suite bathroom. The building also has two kitchens, a cloakroom, an office and a medical clinic. The outdoor provision consists of a sizable area partly covered in artificial grass and soft paving. There is also a very large sandpit and an outside covered classroom area.

There are currently 88 children aged between 18 months and 6 years on the roll. On the second day of the accreditation visit 84 attended, 11 of whom were under 2½ years. Currently the International Montessori Pre-School is open during term times only, from 07.30 to 14.00 on Sunday, Monday, Wednesday and Thursday and also on Tuesday, when it closes at 13.00. All the children attend a minimum of three days a week, and all



attend for the whole session unless they are collected earlier to have an afternoon sleep at home. They bring their own lunch and are provided with a snack. The children in the Early Years Unit can bring their own snack if they prefer.

As well as the principal, the setting employs a head teacher and a team of 21 staff including an accountant, administrators and a nurse. Six teaching staff (including the principal and the head) hold a Montessori qualification to at least Level 4. Five members of staff have Bachelor degrees and two, including the principal, have Masters in Education. The principal is responsible for the day to day running of the setting and works full time; the head is in charge in her absence. On the second day of the accreditation visit 22 members of staff were present. The majority of the staff members work full time. The pre-school makes provision for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities and the primary languages spoken are English and Arabic.

Summary

International Montessori Pre-School has a very warm and welcoming atmosphere, and its commitment to Montessori philosophy and practice is very evident. The staff provide many opportunities for children to find their own ways to create and develop their ideas in a nurturing and happy multicultural environment.

The pre-school is housed in a charming villa, which is large, light and has been very well adapted to accommodate the pre-school; the outside area is exceptionally well prepared and covers all the Montessori and EYFS curriculum areas. However, as the surfaces outside are largely artificial, planting vegetables in the pots there and including more nature study in the classrooms would give the children greater opportunities to understand and experience the natural world.

After the initial settling period in the morning, the daily routine is flexible and gives 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 children's right to choose, make decisions and voice their thoughts and opinions is supported exceptionally well so that they are fully included and develop a strong sense of belonging and self-esteem.

By introducing a more robust observation and recording system, the children's achievements and progress could be more accurately monitored and the environment then adapted to meet their needs more effectively. The observation process would also be enhanced by introducing in-depth peer on peer staff observations.

The strong leadership and management of the pre-school and their knowledgeable and motivated team work very successfully together. The decision to apply for accreditation is a testament to their commitment to self-evaluation and improvement.



The school provides an education which follows the principles of the Montessori approach and environment and this merits accreditation by the Montessori Evaluation and Accreditation Board. Consideration should be given to the following points for further development:

- implement a more robust observation and recording system in order to track children's progress and plan their next steps more fully;
- introduce in-depth and evaluated peer on peer observations; and
- introduce more nature study opportunities into the classrooms and outside by, for example, changing many of the current snack tables into nature tables and using the existing pots in the garden for planting.

Philosophy:

Adherence to the Montessori philosophy is the foundation of the learning programme offered to the children in the International Montessori Pre-School. The staff team provides them with a safe and stimulating prepared environment and gives them the freedom to explore and learn at their own pace within this mixed-age setting. The school's aim is to give the children the opportunity to develop self-confidence and social skills, and to offer an education which provides an academically challenging integrated curriculum that supports individual development.

The staff members are excellent role models and have high expectations of the children's behaviour. They help them to learn about and respect themselves, the environment and each other, and to develop self-discipline. They ensure that the children have a very positive experience of school, and are extremely adept at supporting them effectively.

Excellent contact is kept with the parents through the website, newsletters sent via email, parent/teacher meetings and through the voluntary Parent Forum Council. All of these lines of communication are used to promote the children's learning and development. The information and documentation provided for parents reflect the pre-school's commitment to Montessori philosophy and practice.

The staff work well together as a team. The regular staff meetings and verbal communications ensure that they are all fully informed of any changes and have an opportunity to develop their practice.

Learning and Development:

The children's learning opportunities are structured in accordance with the Montessori



early years curriculum, with reference to the EYFS areas of learning and development. They access this curriculum through topic work and through opportunities to use the wide range of materials and activities, indoors and out. The children beyond the Early Years Unit can access any area they choose during the work cycle, which is 2¾ hours long. The benefits of this well-established vertical age grouping are very much in evidence: younger children have plenty of opportunities to learn from their more experienced elders, which provides an atmosphere of social cohesion across the setting. The children in the Early Years Unit spend the first part of the morning in the garden and then have a shorter work cycle in their room. This routine works well to support their specific needs.

The carefully prepared indoor learning environment is set up by the class teachers, who aim to follow the developmental needs of children across the age range. Each area of the curriculum is housed in a different room and staff members take it in turns to prepare and monitor the separate areas. The outdoor environment, half of which is under cover, also has a classroom area offering a wide range of appropriate activities. The rest of the large open space outside is exceptionally well resourced and covers all seven EYFS areas of learning. The pre-school has ample space for children to develop their physical skills both indoors and out and there are opportunities for children to find their own ways to explore and develop their ideas. During the accreditation visit there were children 'driving to school' in their pedal cars and others were building a house in the sand pit.

Each child is allocated a key person who is supported by an assistant. The key person is responsible for bringing their key children together to start the work cycle and for gathering them again for lunch, as well as for keeping the children's records up to date. Presently the long term planning is prepared annually and collectively by staff, and includes the themes for the year. On the days of the accreditation visit, activities were themed around the 'rainforest'. Medium term and short term planning currently does not reflect the information gathered from observations made of the children. It is suggested that all staff write full observations on each of the children attending their area, including outdoors. The key person could then use these observations to chart each child's progress and to compile weekly plans, including which materials they may need.

All the class teachers recognise the importance of working co-operatively with other professionals, such as with Stars for Special Abilities. Individual learning plans are drawn up for children with additional needs and a list of local agencies and brochures are given to parents when there are concerns about a child's development. As many of the staff and children are multilingual, the children can usually be supported in their native language; the staff and children speak different languages freely. To further promote the good practice already in place, staff could introduce a key word system, which would be especially useful for those children not supported by a native speaker. Cultural diversity is promoted through presentations of materials and cultural events and is a strong area for the school.



Prepared Environment: resources and materials

The building is very light and airy and care is taken to cover the glass so that the indoor environment remains cool. A welcoming atmosphere is very evident. Each room and the outside area are equipped to provide high quality learning opportunities for the children attending. The rooms are clearly defined by curriculum areas and are prepared in accordance with the Montessori philosophy. The shelves are well organised, very clean and the activities are ready for use, complete and appealing. The nature study provision is a little sparse and there is very little evidence of natural objects in the classrooms. It is therefore recommended that some of the tables currently used for snack are changed into nature tables and that plants, for example, are introduced into all the classrooms. While drinking water should be available in every room, just one snack table would be sufficient for each floor. This reduction in the number of snack tables could also improve the child's social experience of having snack and these areas could be more easily monitored by staff. Consideration could also be given as to how to involve the children in the preparation of snack.

As well as the Montessori rooms there is an 'Arabic room', which also doubles as a room for digital tablet use, and an exceptionally well-resourced and outstanding art room, which the children can access whenever they choose. On both days of the visit the children were re-creating the rainforest with a variety of different media under the guidance of their highly competent art teacher.

The clinic is on the ground floor and easily accessible for both the children and parents who may need to discuss medical issues with the qualified nurse. The children and their parents are very well catered for at this pre-school.

The main classrooms on the ground floor have direct access to the exceptional outside area which, on both days of the visit, was very popular with the children. They can develop their skills and learning very comprehensively while playing outdoors. Soft paving and artificial grass make up the majority of the surface of this area. Sun shades cover much of the space, which is divided up into defined areas of learning. There is a very large and well-equipped sand pit, which has climbing apparatus with a bucket-pulley system attached. There are three playhouses, a mini trampoline, slides and swings, as well as a covered and well-resourced outside classroom area. On one day of the accreditation visit a child was making 'raspberry pancakes' for friends in one of the playhouses. Pots in the garden could be used to plant seeds so that the children can have experience of growing vegetables and then eating them, which would cover many aspects of the Montessori curriculum and the EYFS.

Children under 2½ years have their own separate room, the Early Years Unit. This is also set up according to the Montessori philosophy with age-appropriate materials. Although there are treasure baskets on the premises, none were evident on the days of the accreditation visit. These, along with materials to promote heuristic play, would further enhance the good practice already in place in this room for the youngest children. All the children have access to the well-equipped role play area when they first arrive. This is situated near the Early Years Unit.



The staff team creates an environment, both inside and out, that is calm and fosters co-operative learning and the children enjoy making very good use of this favourable Montessori environment.

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

The children at the International Montessori Pre-School have plenty of time and encouragement from staff to develop independence and follow established routines. The staff trust the children to pursue their own interests and those beyond the Early Years Unit move around the indoor and outdoor areas independently. This gives the children the freedom to choose which area of the curriculum to access during the work cycle, on either floor or outside. The children's responsibility for themselves, their respect for the environment and their ready response to the expectations of those who work with them is very much in evidence. Children are encouraged to look after their own needs, with supportive adults being available should their help be required. The staff members appreciate the advantages of having a mixed age range, which promotes mutual support and respect for others. The children are able to choose who they work with and when. They are given time to complete their own cycles of activity free of interruption and have the choice, for the majority of the morning, whether to work individually or as a part of a small group. Currently the work cycle is 2¾ hours long, which gives the children enough time to work at their own pace.

Snack tables are available for the children in each room. The older children help themselves and those in the Early Years Unit are supported by the adults working with them. When the morning work cycle is completed the children are encouraged to join their key group. They are given time to finish their activities and transition to lunch is smooth.

The children and staff demonstrate high levels of respect for the materials, environment and each other, which makes for a very congenial and industrious working environment, and parents highly appreciate and value the level of independence the children demonstrate at home. The setting works hard with families to promote children's growing independence.

Montessori practice: Classroom management

The majority of the children arrive between 07.30 and 08.30. They start their day in the room designated for role play and, as more children arrive, they can go outside when the days are not too hot. The children then return into the school building with their key person for a whole group activity at 08.50 and a different group of children each day



has a short PE session before their work cycle. The children are then able to start moving around the curriculum areas and rooms independently. Staff members limit the number of children who go back outside by using a band system, which works very well.

The principal is considering extending the period of free choice; letting the children use the curriculum areas earlier in the morning would extend their opportunities for independent learning and lengthen the work cycle. One of the outstanding features of this pre-school is the way the children confidently and independently move around the areas of learning during the work cycle, deciding for themselves where they work and what they do within the well prepared environment, guided by all the staff who work with the children. The youngest children benefit from the free flow aspect of the nursery.

The adults prepare water, fruit and crackers for the children's snack, which they are able to access when they choose throughout the morning. The Early Years Unit's children can bring their own snack and have it together in their own room, which is appropriate practice.

A bell is rung to tell the children to get ready for lunch. The children know that they have to go to their key person and join the others in their group for lunch in the curriculum area rooms. After a short group activity the children help prepare the tables for lunch. All the children bring their own food and the staff are on hand to help them. The children help themselves to their cutlery, pour their own drinks and clear their plates when they have finished. Children who need to sleep are provided with a bed, but more usually they go home early to sleep. Everyone enjoys the outside area and role play room after lunch, before going home.

Montessori Practice: links with parents, including reports and records

There is an excellent rapport between all the staff and the parents, who are highly appreciative of what the Montessori approach gives their children. They value the calm and well-ordered environment. Parents spoken to during the visit were delighted with the level of independence the children were able to demonstrate at home.

The pre-school staff team has many ways to communicate with parents including social media, notice boards, the parents' handbook and newsletters. Communication with the parents is excellent and they also have daily verbal reports and written information in a book that is sent home each week. Parent/teacher meetings are held termly. Formal reports are written twice a year (one in the first term and one in the last term), and a comprehensive transition document is prepared for a child's next school under the Montessori curriculum areas of learning. Parents are invited to volunteer or be involved in the pre-school through events and provision of activities such as helping with different languages. They also have a Parent Forum Council.



Currently the class teachers make brief observations on all the children who attend their area. It is recommended that the observation, recording and planning system currently in place continues to be reviewed so that all the staff contribute fully to the children's Learning Journals, whilst the responsibility remains with the key person to collate the information gathered, to evaluate staff's observations and to suggest next steps. It is recommended that all the staff complete full observations on all the children attending their area. These will provide a more accurate representation of the children's progress and will make staff more aware of the developmental needs of all the children who visit their area so that they can more successfully offer appropriate materials and presentations to maximize the children's potential. The children are happy and settled learners. Communication between the staff and children is excellent, and this relationship makes a significant contribution to the calm and purposeful atmosphere in the whole nursery.

Staffing:

The pre-school employs 22 members of staff, of whom 16 are in teaching roles. The well-organised staffing structure in place is very evident. While the principal has overall responsibility for the setting, she recognises her staff's individual skills, delegates duties, and supports the newly appointed head in her leadership role. She demonstrates a profound commitment to the pre-school and works hard to develop and improve its practice.

The range of qualifications of the staff is broad; six of the teaching staff hold a Montessori diploma and two are currently training for this qualification. All staff members have at least 30 hours of professional development training per year and care is taken to give additional guidance when planning the curriculum and materials for the children. Recent training has included first aid and child protection, which all the staff attended. The nurse is qualified to look after the health needs of the children.

A mentoring system is in place for new staff along with a comprehensive induction programme which includes information on the Montessori method of education, policies and procedures as well as the staff handbook. New staff members feel well supported. Twice-weekly minuted meetings keep all the staff well informed.

Staff complete self-evaluation forms but the peer on peer observation process needs to be reviewed. It is recommended that a more robust system is introduced to help identify areas for development and to recognise and share good practice across the team. This would serve to demonstrate the ambitious vision the principal has for her school and ensure high standards of provision are maintained. The principal and head regularly evaluate the quality of the provision and outcomes for children through self-evaluation and they are determined to keep their action plan current. Undertaking this accreditation demonstrates their commitment to the Montessori philosophy and to working towards achieving the highest standards.



Name of Assessor: Charlotte White

Date report submitted: 28th February 2016