

Montessori Evaluation and Accreditation Board

School Accreditation

This report is a supplement to the setting's previous MEAB Accreditation Final Report, which is published in conjunction with this report.

This report was prepared following, and is based on, two accreditation visits made on behalf of the Montessori Evaluation and Accreditation Board. It considers how the setting meets the criteria set out by MEAB. The school is registered with the National Education Directory of Albania. The report does not provide any assessment of financial aspects of the setting.

Receiving accreditation carries the expectation that the setting will continue to work on the issues highlighted in this report and will remain committed to the ongoing development of its practice. Furthermore, that it will report to the MEAB office any relevant changes such as to premises address, ownership, hours of operation, or to the age range of children attending.

The International Montessori School of Albania

Bilal Golemi Street, Nr. 16, Tirana, Albania 1019

Date of previous MEAB accreditation: June 2015

This accreditation is valid until December 2022

This accreditation report relates to the provision for children aged 9 months to 6 years of age.

Description of the school:

The International Montessori School of Albania (IMSA) is located in two renovated villas in a residential area of Tirana. The school was established in 2008 and is owned by a private organisation along with The World Academy of Tirana (WAT). In 2015 the partner school, WAT, moved from two neighbouring villas to other premises, enabling IMSA to expand its facilities, including its outdoor area.

The first villa offers an infant room (Butterflies) for children from 9 to 24 months and two toddler rooms for children from 2 to 3 years (Bunnies and Ladybugs). There is an indoor play area on the third floor and the setting's kitchen and reception office in the basement. The second villa comprises three Casa classrooms for children from 3 to 6 years of age (Dolphins, Hummingbirds and Elephants). There is a spacious basement here for indoor play and a children's kitchen. Cloakroom facilities and sleep rooms are connected to each class in each villa.

The outdoor area surrounding the villas contains play equipment, a garden with

opportunities for caring for vegetables and other plants, and pens with chickens and ducks. The sizeable play area contains two pieces of apparatus for climbing, a trampoline and a slide. There is a large sandpit and two small play houses. There is also an artificial grassed area for ball games and a section protected from the elements with a canopy.

The Montessori qualified Director and Academic Director are employed to take responsibility for running IMSA with the support of the six lead teachers (five of whom are Montessori trained), along with 12 assistants, a school nurse, an administrator officer and auxiliary staff. All staff work from 08.00 until 16.00.

The school is registered for 90 children and is currently open during term times only. Children may attend between 08.15 and 09.00 and can be collected from 15.15 to 16.00. Most children attend every day although some leave before lunch when they first join the school. On the second day of the reaccreditation visit there were eight babies, 16 toddlers, and 62 children in the Casa classes. Nineteen staff were present, three of whom worked directly with the babies.

The main language spoken is English; however, many staff are multi-lingual and the school supports children for whom English is not their primary language. There is good provision for children with additional needs and a psychologist makes visits if required. Breakfast, lunch and snacks are freshly prepared on the premises. All children are given the opportunity to sleep following lunch and specialist teachers visit to offer music and drama tuition.

Summary

The International Montessori School of Albania is a very welcoming and inspiring Montessori school. The Director is passionate about creating an ordered environment and a strength of the school lies in her ability to share and enhance knowledge of the Montessori approach with the staff team and with parents. Following recommendations made at the previous MEAB accreditation, the Directors have enabled the teaching assistants to gain more knowledge and responsibility through the effective use of observations which provide detailed feedback and guidance for their continuing professional development. The school has also introduced a secure and more effective online recording system so parents are able to clearly view their children's progress.

The Director and Academic Director have also taken many steps to enhance positive relations with parents and the wider community. A new reception area for families has been established, a parents' council is about to be established and there is an excellent parents handbook, social media page and an online management system with a secure parents information page. Parents or other carers have the opportunity to stay between 15.15 and 16.00 when they collect children, enabling them to develop very effective relations with staff, deepening their knowledge of the Montessori approach and of their child's learning and development.

In line with the school's current development plan it is suggested that the team continues to consider how children can be better engaged and encouraged to be more creative in the outdoor environment. Furthermore, to enhance opportunities for children's independence, it is recommended that china crockery, glasses and child-sized cutlery be introduced.

The setting 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:

- the team should continue to consider how the outdoor environment may be used to enhance children's creativity, role play, communication and language development; and
- it is recommended that china crockery, glasses and child-sized cutlery be introduced in order to enhance opportunities for independence.

An Action Plan has been drawn up with, and retained by, the setting to address these recommendations.

Philosophy:

The IMSA provides an excellent quality of Montessori education across all its age groups. This is due to the regard for, and commitment to, Montessori principles shown by the Director and the Academic Director. They work passionately to develop a capable, loyal team who ensure children are respected and trusted in every way. The team is very adept at making sure that the beautiful and ordered Montessori environment provides many opportunities for the development of self-initiated learning and self-discipline. Each class is carefully prepared and led to ensure the mixed ages of children within it are appropriately stimulated and engaged.

Staff members have a clear view of their roles and are very well informed about the Montessori approach. They show genuine skill in supporting independence and record excellent observations of children's progress and development. The school's commitment to the Montessori approach is clearly defined in job descriptions, the parents handbook, on the website and through the many publications made available to parents. The principle of "following the child" is strongly fostered at every opportunity by all adults in this inspirational team.

Learning and Development:

Children learn and develop through their use of the excellent range of Montessori materials indoors. The classes are systematically arranged, well organised and provide age-appropriate Montessori learning resources. Lead teachers observe very effectively

and make plans for individual children each week. This works very well and assistants are supported as they carry out presentations and contribute ideas for planning. The whole Casa staff team meet each week to plan themes or festivals such as Chinese New Year or International Day of Peace. At the end of each term a comprehensive checklist of the Montessori areas of learning is used to document each child's progress and parents are invited to consultations to share this information with key staff.

The babies have continuous free choice of activities for about an hour each morning and are gradually introduced to appropriate resources as they learn to stand, walk and carry. The toddlers have about two hours for their work cycle and the older children can select activities independently for up to three hours continuously. Many opportunities are also available during snack and lunch times for independent work, both setting up and clearing away. There is a good balance of adult-led and child-initiated activities across each class. On the second day of the reaccreditation visit an assistant was observed to very capably balance the diverse needs and interests of the children she was working with.

Due to the design of the buildings children are accompanied to the outdoor areas at specific times in the day. The large play area, the indoor basement and the garden surrounding the villas provide good opportunities for physical play. However, it is recommended that the team starts to consider ways to expand opportunities for creative and imaginative play and communication development in the outdoor environment, such as through provision for role play. Caring for plants is encouraged both in the classes and outside and there is a good selection of appropriate tools for the children to use for this task. Children are also able to care for and observe animals, as ducks and chickens are outside in pens and most classes have fish. The opportunity for children to learn and develop at IMSA is very well provided for by the excellent indoor environment and the committed staff team.

Prepared Environment: resources and materials

The indoor Montessori environment at IMSA is exceptional. The hallways, reception and wash and sleep rooms have been beautifully set up to inspire a sense of calm and peace throughout the school. Each classroom is highly organised, appealing and offers a wide range of very high quality Montessori materials.

The babies are offered a stimulating, developmentally appropriate environment wherein staff members show an excellent knowledge of child development. Interesting resources are set out on low shelving and there is plenty of floor space and soft furnishings for babies to move about on. Staff start to introduce opportunities for independence through activities and resources such as hand-sewn place mats for mealtimes that have cutlery and crockery outlines on them. The toddler classes are spacious, very well organised and exceptionally well maintained. There is an atmosphere of calm and purposeful work as children practice simple daily routines and are gently and effectively guided by staff.

The three Casa classes are light, spacious and appealing, with beautiful wooden floors and large windows. They have been very well designed and are set out in clearly

defined Montessori areas. The snack and rest areas have been carefully thought through and offer excellent opportunities for independence. Beautiful pictures at child height, simple mobiles and plants and flowers add to the harmonious atmosphere of each class. Adults show skill in preparing, maintaining and adapting the environment as the day progresses. They move about, unobtrusively supporting and guiding children or redirecting if required, and they encourage the children to help care for their classrooms. The outdoor areas and the indoor play basement are well resourced for physical play and most play equipment here is in good order.

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

Independence is strongly fostered at IMSA, and this was observed during the reaccreditation visit, with one of the youngest children feeding themselves for the first time, right through to a 5 year old carefully and independently copying a flag of New Zealand. All staff members work with sensitivity and give time and freedom to children to successfully and independently complete tasks. They show trust in children to learn spontaneously and to follow their interests, either on their own or in a group, they enable them to repeat activities and they present activities to the children diligently and with regard for their level of development. They talk and answer questions openly yet quietly, and support children to find answers for themselves.

The snack areas have been designed to promote independence and to encourage children to follow the routines. Child-level sinks, cupboards and work tops give opportunities for children to prepare, help themselves and clear away food and drinks. The addition of china crockery, glasses and small stainless steel cutlery will enhance this opportunity for independence, as children will learn to respect tableware more effectively.

The adults enable children to move about the rooms selecting activities of their choice and at all times they show respect for others and model this effectively for the children. The lead teachers work successfully to reinforce for parents the importance of allowing children the opportunity to do things for themselves. They share with them the significance of consistent routines and of promoting choice for children. Parent consultations, informative newsletters and daily discussions are all employed to foster this understanding of the child's autonomy with their family.

Montessori Practice: links with parents, including reports and records

Due to the professionalism and dedication of the Director, IMSA is a very friendly and welcoming school. Since the previous MEAB accreditation the addition of a pleasant reception area for families, with its excellent information resources, now enables parents to discover more about the Montessori ethos. Parents feel very well informed about the approach and talk about how some routines at home have been changed. The online record-keeping system used by key teachers to record observations is also used to inform parents about their child's progress. This recording and sharing of information

works very well, although it may be an idea for all practitioners to have the opportunity to add their observations of children onto this record.

Parent consultations are planned three times each year and these are now well attended, as parents can book a time to attend over the course of a week. There are many opportunities for families to be involved in the daily life of the school by, for example, coming in to celebrate a child's birthday or to read to children. Informative newsletters from each lead teacher are distributed each month and all staff members greet families as they arrive and depart from school. A school calendar with events for the year is emailed to all families and they feel very well informed. In the Butterflies room parents receive information daily about the babies' routines and progress through their individual communication books, and parents speak highly of them.

Excellent reports are prepared at the end of the academic year. These are written in detail, they are arranged into the different areas of learning and include a section on social and emotional development. Daily observations and individual plans are marked on charts designed by each lead teacher and these appear to work well. From the observations it is clear that staff members know the children really well.

Staff: qualifications, deployment, and performance management

The school demonstrates a commitment to employing Montessori qualified staff and to the team's continuing professional development. Two staff members are currently training in the Montessori approach. All staff who work directly with children hold degrees and have received specific Montessori in-house training. Their Montessori practice is excellent and is regularly evaluated and enhanced through the use of 'class observations' designed by the Director.

The staff induction process is robust and job descriptions are comprehensive and commit staff members to the successful delivery of Montessori principles and of the prepared environment. There is an excellent staff handbook which clearly outlines the school's commitment to the Montessori approach and specifies exactly what is required of the team. Weekly staff meetings ensure all staff are informed about events, and lesson evaluations are shared successfully.

Under the inspirational leadership of the Director, all staff show genuine respect for the children and families, and their passion for and knowledge of the Montessori approach is felt from the moment one enters the school.

Name of Assessor: Carolyn O J McNeill

Date of reaccreditation visits: 19th and 20th September, 2018

Date report submitted: 22nd September, 2018