

## **Montessori Evaluation and Accreditation Board**

### **School Accreditation**

This report is prepared following one accreditation visit made on behalf of the Montessori Evaluation and Accreditation Board. It considers how far the school follows the criteria set out by MEAB. The school has received licence to operate from the Ministry of Education. The report does not address the standards and quality issues which are the responsibility of the Ministry of Education, which reports separately. Also the report does not provide any assessment of financial aspects of the school.

Receiving accreditation carries the expectation that settings will continue to work on the issues highlighted in this report and will remain committed to the ongoing development of their practice. Furthermore, that they 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 Children's House Montessori School Bahrain**

Building 208, Road 57, Block 557, Janabiyah, Kingdom of Bahrain

Dates of accreditation visit: 6 to 8 February 2017

This accreditation is valid until 31 July 2021

This accreditation report relates to the provision for children aged 2 to 6 years

#### **Description of the school:**

The Children's House Montessori School is privately owned and was established in 1997. It is an English-speaking school and has sole use of a two-storey converted villa. There is a large entrance hall and one classroom for children aged 2 to 3 years on the ground floor. The library, a playroom, kitchen and principal's office are also situated on this floor.

There are four further classroom areas on the first floor as well as a staff resource room. These classes are divided between two age groups: 3 to 4 and 5 to 6 year olds. Each of the three age ranges has a lead teacher and assistant staff. The building has direct access to an outdoor area with water and sand play, wheeled toys, a climbing frame and play house, as well as creative corners used for role-play activities. A 'theatre' is also located in the outside area and is used for extra activities such as concerts and physical education.

Currently there are 48 children on the roll aged between 2 and 5 years, five of whom are

aged 5. On the days of the accreditation visit 39 children attended. The school opens at 08.00 and closes at 12.30. The older children generally attend all five mornings. The younger children have the option of attending three, four or five mornings. The school is open for 36 weeks a year and offers after-school care on Wednesdays as well as holiday clubs. The provision for after-school care and holiday clubs is not considered in this report.

The setting offers support to children with special educational needs and/or disabilities by working with their parents and outside agencies as necessary. The school offers additional activities including Arabic. Music and physical education are taught by visiting professionals.

The proprietor is not in regular attendance. The setting is led by a principal who works full time. The school employs a further ten full time members of staff, nine of whom work directly with the children. Four have a Montessori qualification including the principal who is well qualified as she also has two honours degrees, one in education, and has completed a Montessori Trainers course. Two members of staff have degrees in early childhood education and another is also a graduate. One of the assistant teachers is a qualified nurse.

## Summary

The well-qualified team at The Children's House Montessori School provides a warm and nurturing environment for children to develop and thrive in. The parents are helped to reinforce the Montessori ethos at home with guidance from the setting offered through the comprehensive website and Parent Handbook; there is an abundance of written and verbal support for them. The parents speak highly of the staff and appreciate the contact they have with the setting. Written observations of children are currently the responsibility of each class's lead teacher, who compiles the written records and planning for each child and writes comprehensive reports at the end of the year.

The school is exceptionally well resourced, with each of its separate areas having developmentally appropriate activities within easy reach of the children. The materials are of a high standard and are beautifully prepared and maintained. The staff members know the children well, and the extended work cycle facilitates a tailored learning experience for every child, with emphasis on the Montessori principles of freedom of choice and grace and courtesy. Staff can trust the children to develop their own unique potential and learn at their individual pace.

The management is experienced and very well qualified, as are most of the members of staff. In-house training involves everyone working at the school and is used to keep their practice up to date. The staff team is enthusiastic and flexible, as is demonstrated by the way they are able to adapt their practice to the needs of the children.

***The school provides an education which follows the principles of the Montessori approach and environment. The school merits accreditation by the***

**Montessori Evaluation and Accreditation Board. Consideration should be given to the following points for further development:**

- to continue to embed the recently extended work cycle and so ensure that the children have enough time to work independently and without interruption from whole group activities;
- to provide children with the freedom to choose when to take their snack during the session and to give them the opportunity to wash up afterwards; and
- to review, simplify and standardise the record-keeping system so that it can be used more effectively by all staff members.

**Philosophy:**

Montessori philosophy is very evident in the practice of The Children's House Montessori School. Every child is treated as an individual, with patience and respect. Children are confident and articulate and they obviously enjoy spending time in school.

Staff members provide the children with a beautifully prepared environment where, following recent changes, they are offered the freedom to learn through play and exploration. The accreditation visit was over three consecutive days and, following a recommendation made on the first day, the staff re-organised the session on the subsequent mornings by reducing the interruptions to the children's work cycle. They gave the children the freedom to choose to join a circle or not and they took small groups out of each class into the garden during the morning. This change to the children's routine resulted in greater concentration, and the calmer atmosphere was very obvious as the children had the benefit of a much extended work cycle. With this new routine they will have more time to progress at their own pace according to their individual needs and capabilities. These changes will take time to be embedded fully into the setting's practice; however, the way the staff team engaged in this change is testament to their dedication to the Montessori philosophy of following the child and builds on already strong foundations of good Montessori practice.

The children are grouped by age but the range is broad, with a two year age span in the oldest of the three classes. To support the children further by promoting a greater mix across the age range, an invitation system could be devised so that the children can visit and work in other classes should they wish to do so.

The comprehensive website includes an explanation of Montessori philosophy. The staff team meets regularly to discuss the principles, aims and philosophy of the school and policies are reviewed when necessary. Partnership with the parents is excellent. As well as on the website, information about Montessori education is available to the parents in the Parent Handbook, at parents meetings and during daily contact.

## **Learning and Development:**

The lead teacher for each age range plans activities offered to the children but all the staff contribute to their class's themed activity plans. Long and medium term planning includes a wide variety of topics and links directly with Montessori materials. It was very obvious in the classrooms during the visit that all the children were learning about life cycles. Many different activities relating to their topic were provided for the children to explore: books, pictures, music and artwork promoted their learning and frogs and turtles, which were humanely kept in bowls for the children to examine, gave them a real experience of nature.

All the classrooms are organised into Montessori areas of learning and the children have access to a full curriculum. Members of staff very successfully differentiate the materials so that they meet the needs of the diverse ages of children in each class. All the children also have the advantage of having access to the well-stocked library, the theatre, and an indoor playroom which they can also use when it is too hot to go out to the garden.

The children successfully use representation in their play and they make connections between what they have been learning through using Montessori materials with their use of other resources. Mathematical development is also very well supported. During the visit one child was folding and cutting paper and said, "I am changing a rectangle into a square". Two other children designed and built a 'dinosaur robot' with a variety of sensorial materials, collaborating amicably as they progressed with their project. Arabic lessons are offered daily by one of the permanent members of staff. Written labels in English and Arabic would further promote children's language and literacy.

The lead teachers are responsible for assessing and individual planning for the children in their class and for offering most of the Montessori material presentations. It is recommended that the school reviews its methods of planning, recording and assessing for individual children to ensure that the same system is used throughout the school as well as simplifying and consolidating records. Changing from a material-based target system to a skills-based target system would mean that all the adults working with the children could play a more active role in observation and record-keeping as, while the staff members are well qualified, not all are Montessori trained.

The staff acknowledge the importance of working with parents and other professionals who may be involved in the care and development of the children. They are attuned to the needs of children with English as an additional language and help them develop their language skills appropriately with the support of their parents.

The garden area is well resourced, with space for the children to enjoy outdoor activities such as climbing, digging and role-play. They have a 'road' for their bicycles and cars and planters for flowers. The children plant and water flowers themselves, giving them real experience of nature. The garden is now used during the work cycle by small groups of children.

The receptive, proactive attitude of the staff to the initial recommendation of extending

the work cycle means that the breadth of the curriculum offered can be more fully enjoyed as the children have access to the full range of learning and development opportunities for a longer part of each session. It is recommended that staff fully embed the recent changes in order to see their positive impact on the children's learning and development.

### **Prepared Environment: resources and materials**

The entrance hall and classrooms are light and airy and care is taken to cover the windows when the weather is very hot. Each classroom is equipped to a very high standard with materials suitable for the age and stages of development of the children using it. Predominately adult-led children's art work is displayed on the walls of the classrooms, in the hall and up the stairs. The older children have free use of their three separate rooms. One has activities for everyday living, language and mathematical materials, all beautifully presented and laid out systematically. The book corner and cultural materials are in an adjacent room. The snack table and sensorial materials as well as the creative area are in their other room. The children are free to move from one curriculum area to another during the work cycle.

The middle age range uses one room on the first floor which has an alcove area used for snack and messy play. The youngest age range use the classroom on the ground floor and, as well as early Montessori materials, there are puzzles, posting activities and resources that promote heuristic play. There is a separate area for role-play, painting and snack. Excellent use is made of the layout of each classroom. All the materials are accessible and laid out systematically according to Montessori philosophy, and they are all clean and appealing. The welcoming atmosphere is very evident throughout the whole school.

The indoor playroom is equipped with a slide and has a strong emphasis on role-play, with a 'post office', carpentry bench and 'supermarket' as well as various construction toys and books. The library has an abundance of books for the children to read or to be read to them. On the days of the visit the children did not use the playroom or the library. The theatre was used for physical education.

An awning to protect the children from the sun covers the majority of the outside area. The garden is divided into different areas of learning. The large sandpit was very popular during the visit. While the surface and much of the equipment outdoors are made of artificial materials, care has been taken to provide the children with opportunities to experience nature, such as using planters in which they grow their own flowers.

The lead teachers take overall responsibility for the care of the prepared environment inside and outside; they are very well supported by the assistant staff, and all encourage the children to play their part in this task. The thought given to providing a very broad and suitable curriculum for all the children is one of the outstanding features of this school.

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

Opportunities to develop independence start as soon as the children enter the school in the morning. Taking responsibility for oneself and the children's positive responses to the adults' expectations are very much in evidence during their time in school. The children are encouraged to put their resources away after use and, although staff members clean up generally, the children are supported when tidying up after themselves.

Following changes made during the accreditation visit, the children can now have supervised access to the outside area during the morning work cycle if they choose and less emphasis has been placed on the need for children to attend whole group activities such as circle time. The adults have shown that they can trust the children's choices. It is recommended that the staff build on the newly extended work cycle to enable children to benefit fully from the excellent provision. They have changed the times at which the extra activities take place and therefore now ensure that any large group activities are scheduled towards the end of the morning.

Each of the groups has access to a snack table and the children can have their snack when they choose throughout the morning but care should be taken to ensure that this is consistent across all of the classes. Being given the opportunity to wash up at the end of their snack would also offer the children the freedom to complete this cycle of activity and engage in purposeful play.

Respect for the environment, for the materials and for each other are outstanding features of this school. The adults act as excellent role-models and the multicultural mix of the adults and children contributes to the understanding children gain of others. Parents are invited in for an International Lunch with their children, for which all are encouraged to provide food and wear clothes that represent their country of origin and/or beliefs. This event is very popular with the staff, the parents and the children and promotes understanding and respect in a fun and constructive manner.

Great care is taken by the staff to encourage the parents to foster independence at home. As well as extensive literature and verbal communication, they are given opportunities to see for themselves how the children learn in school. Most of the parents spoken to at the time of the visit feel confident using aspects of the Montessori philosophy at home by giving their children freedom of choice and encouraging their emerging independence.

### **Montessori Practice: links with parents, including reports and records**

An outstanding feature of this school is the support the parents feel that they have from the staff, especially parents who are new to the country. Those spoken to during the accreditation visit were keen to share their experiences and spoke highly of the way the staff look after their children. The induction procedure for new children is very

supportive, with parents being given time to settle them in. Two formal parent consultation evenings take place each year with the lead teachers in each class. The lead teachers are also responsible for writing the end of year report for each child. This has two parts, a tick chart under the areas of learning and a written description of the child's achievement and progress. These reports are used as a transition document for the children's next school when they leave. It is recommended that the staff review, simplify and standardise the record-keeping system so that it can be used more effectively by all staff members, with more emphasis on evaluation and analysis of children's possible next steps in their development. The record-keeping should be available for all the staff to use and should be of the same format throughout the school.

Parents are able to visit the school to see their children at work. They are invited to see their children perform at a concert and can come into school and volunteer to read to the children, which gives them another opportunity to see how their children are learning. Verbal communication with the parents is very evident and the principal and staff also share information via the website and by regular emails and newsletters. There is also an informative notice board in the entrance hall.

There is an active Parent Teacher Association to promote links between school and home. Three main family events are organised throughout the year – a family fun day, the International Lunch and Easter sports day. School trips to the adjacent farm also take place. These all help reinforce the community atmosphere of this setting, which places high importance on making and maintaining strong links with families for the benefit of their children.

### **Staff: qualifications, deployment, and performance management.**

The principal has overall responsibility for managing the school and is supported by a full-time secretary. She recognises her staff members' individual skills and delegates the running of the classes to the lead teachers.

The members of staff are very well qualified with the three lead teachers as well as the principal being Montessori trained. In-house training is part of the fabric of the school as the staff team has two compulsory sessions a week. They are able to learn from each other and share good practice, not only learning how to present the Montessori materials but also discussing their purpose. There is an excellent induction programme for new staff which covers the policies and procedures of the school. They are also given the comprehensive Employee Handbook and spend time in the school before they start. Job descriptions are personalised and updated when they need to be. These documents refer clearly to the Montessori approach. Minuted meetings are held once a week.

As well as observations made by the principal, peer on peer observations are embedded in practice. Annual appraisals and regular supervision also take place and new staff members feel well supported.

The Children's House Montessori School helps prepare children for their future by giving

them a foundation of life-enhancing skills, a love of learning and an awareness of themselves and others. It fosters a creative approach and encourages the children to become critical thinkers. The staff team acknowledges that early childhood should be skillfully nurtured, and their willingness to adapt their practice for the benefit of their children, along with their decision to apply for accreditation, are a testament to their commitment to Montessori philosophy.

Name of Assessor: Charlotte White

Date report submitted: 9<sup>th</sup> February 2017