

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

The report does not address the standards and quality issues which are the responsibility of the Ministry of Education which reports separately. 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.

Peekaboo Montessori Children's House

14, Paprat, Stre., Dragalevtsi, 1415 Sofia Bulgaria

Date of first accreditation visits: 30 November and 1 December 2016

This accreditation is valid until 31 December 2020

This accreditation report relates to the provision for children aged 1 to 6 years.

Description of the pre-school

Peekaboo Montessori is privately owned and was established in 2013. It offers bi-lingual provision with teachers speaking both Bulgarian and English. It is located in the Dragalevtsi area of Sofia in a converted villa, which has accommodation over five floors. The villa is surrounded by a large garden, which is divided into three areas. It has free-flow access from the toddler room. The pre-school has four large, light classrooms, five bathrooms and five bedrooms, two kitchens, a gym, an office, storage space, and a room for extra activities. The classrooms on the upper floors have access to a balcony.

Currently there are 70 children on the roll altogether and they are divided into two age groups, 1 to 3 and 3 to 6 years. On the day of the accreditation visit 52 stayed for the whole day. The children attend for all five days a week after an initial settling in period. The day is divided into two main sessions, morning and afternoon, supplemented by a breakfast club and after school provision. The school opens at 8.00 and closes at 18.30; lunch starts between 12.00 and 13.00, depending on the age of the children. The pre-school is open for 41 weeks a year and offers summer camps, forest school and a sports school for six weeks during the summer.

The setting also makes comprehensive provision for children with special educational

needs and/or disabilities. Two part time psychologists support the team.

All meals, including breakfast, are provided for the children, who benefit from well-balanced, healthy, seasonal meals with a vegetarian option. The pre-school offers extra activities including music, dance, yoga, drama and gym. The older children can visit the elementary school nearby for German, tennis, climbing, swimming, football and classical ballet. A wide range of these activities are on offer between 16.00 and 18.30 each week day.

The pre-school employs ten members of staff of whom six hold a Montessori qualification and three are currently undertaking Montessori studies. In addition, three members of this team hold degrees in pedagogy and two are qualified nurses. The owner/manager has a bachelor's degree and Montessori certification for 3 to 6 year olds, and is currently studying a Montessori course for 6 to 9 year olds.

Summary

The children are happy and settled and play together co-operatively in this caring environment at Peekaboo Montessori. Each child is valued and treated as an individual, and their independence is respected and promoted. The children are given many opportunities to take care of themselves and each other and the environment inside and out. They talk to each other politely. The staff team establishes clear boundaries for the children with defined expectations of acceptable behaviour. By providing a learning environment that is prepared according to the Montessori philosophy, where the materials are laid out in clearly defined areas of learning on easily accessible shelving, they give them the time and opportunity to follow their own development path. During the morning work cycle numeracy, language, science, history, geography and art and music can be studied at different levels in this truly bilingual pre-school. The main objective of Peekaboo Montessori is to cultivate life long learners.

The commitment to the ethos and practicalities of Montessori philosophy and method is embedded in this pre-school that enjoys exceptional premises and an abundance of branded Montessori equipment.

The school provides an education which follows the principles of the Montessori approach and environment. Consideration should be given to the following points for further development. It is recommended that the staff team members:

- undertake tracking observations of the children's use of the material in each area of learning and review the range of activities on offer to reflect children's developmental needs and interests
- observe each other to ensure that they work together effectively, therefore giving opportunities for meaningful contributions to the way their classrooms operate

- focus their observations of the child by identifying 'critical insight' and defining a range of next steps.

Philosophy:

The aim of Peekaboo Montessori is to build a pre-school where implementation of the Montessori philosophy is in evidence. The building is light and airy and has been suitably adapted to cater for the needs of the young children in it. The management and staff are responsible for the prepared learning environment where the children have freedom of choice and opportunities to learn at their own pace, developing their unique potential. The pre-school has a happy atmosphere and each child is treated as an individual. The mixed age range has the potential of giving the older children the opportunity to serve as mentors and take leadership roles. The teachers track the children's progress using the digital record keeping system as a guide and move them forward using next steps identified by the Montessori early years curriculum. The group leaders work together and share observations of each others' classrooms.

The pre-school's education philosophy and principles are accessible to parents in the hand book, on the website and at the monthly seminars the school holds for them. The parents are able to talk to the staff when they need to, on a daily basis if necessary, and they are informed about everyday activities through the secure online electronic recording system.

The owner's commitment to improving the nursery's practice is evidenced by her willingness to undertake the accreditation.

Learning and Development:

The older children (3 to 6) are organised into three groups of mixed ages and are accommodated in classrooms on the upper floors. As they have no direct access to the garden they use it after the circle time at the end of the morning. The toddlers are situated on the ground floor and are able to go outside during the morning work cycle. This is very beneficial as they have the opportunity to develop their gross motor skills comprehensively.

All the classrooms are organised into Montessori areas of learning and the children have access to the full range of Montessori materials that are systematically displayed on low shelving. The materials to support knowledge and understanding of the world are an outstanding feature of this nursery and great care is given to providing the children with a diverse collection of artifacts for them to explore independently (for example, there is a very wide selection of different seeds and unusually shaped fruits).

Presentations are offered to small groups of children as well as individually. During the day the children are given time to select and repeat activities. More emphasis on individual presentations and tracking of the children's use of the activities would be

beneficial, giving them additional opportunities to engage more closely in the activity and experience the depth of exploration that individual presentations offer. Spontaneous gatherings are supported by adults who are well-prepared and make sure that they do not disturb the concentration of the rest of the class. This was observed during a discussion about volcanoes when children were able to add the ingredients themselves to show how a volcano erupts. They also made 'ice cream' cones from the newly fallen snow.

The garden areas are very well resourced with space for the children to enjoy outdoor activities such as climbing, digging and playing football. On the day of the visit even the very young children were enjoying playing in the snow and had been given spades to help clear the paths. This gives them a real life experience and boosts their self esteem. The older children benefit from a work cycle of at least three hours which starts as soon as they arrive at the pre-school. They help themselves to breakfast, if they want it, and fruits are available for snack throughout the day. The older children access the snack independently and are able to prepare and choose what they eat – this improves their life skills in a practical situation. The toddlers have snack together and are supported in their selection, which is appropriate for this age group. The morning finishes with a circle time before lunch or a visit to the garden, depending on which group they attend.

A large room on the ground floor is used when the weather is too inclement for the children to go outside and this is resourced with activities to support role-play. The bilingual approach ensures that all children become equally proficient in both languages as they are learning Bulgarian and English simultaneously; this is an outstanding feature of this nursery. The children sleep in the afternoon before they partake in the extensive extra activities on offer.

The teachers in each class observe, record and discuss the activities in their classrooms. They support each other as the lead teachers from all the classes observe the practice across the pre-school, giving them the opportunity to see how others perform. The staff team uses a secure digital system to record their observations of the children, and this system helps them generate Montessori activities to further the children's education and move them forward. It is recommended that more 'critical insight' is used to evaluate each child's progress, thus making it easier for all staff to offer relevant presentations to individual children and follow each child's unique interests.

Prepared Environment: resources and materials

This outstanding environment is very light and welcoming and the main entrance hall is bright and used to house the children's outdoor clothes. Here also information regarding the nursery is available to parents in both Bulgarian and English, along with a display of the children's photographs.

The four main classrooms have been very attractively furnished and are all set up and operate independently. The three parallel classes for the older children are set up with

reference to the Montessori method by having designated areas that are clearly defined. The attractive wooden shelving and the position of the tables and chairs ensure that the children can access all the materials independently and that they have the space to choose where to work. The extensive range of Montessori materials is systematically displayed and is clean and appealing. While there is an abundance of materials for the children to use it is recommended that the staff evaluate their relevance in relation to the children's developmental needs and interests. While the classrooms are similar in their organization, each reflects the project the children are currently learning about and the strengths of the lead staff. Each room has a designated book corner, snack and a messy play area, which the children can access independently. The children also benefit from a balcony with resources to extend the classroom environment into the outside.

While all the classrooms have a well-resourced nature area two had outstanding nature provision. The artifacts are very varied and interesting with sensory properties that are systematically displayed and labeled. Each classroom has access to its own bedrooms (where the children sleep after lunch) and lavatory facilities.

The toddler group's main classroom is well resourced with materials designed for this age group. These activities predominately promote early numeracy, language and fine motor skills as the majority of the materials are based on activities for 'everyday living'. There are also puzzles and books. The 'messy' area is used for creativity and meal times, which works well. During the visit the children were painting the windows with a snow scene with small paint brushes, which they were able to do without intervention from adults. More activities to promote spontaneous exploration would further enhance this area.

There are two bedrooms adjacent to the classroom for the toddlers to sleep in when they need to. These children have free-flow access to the garden, which was used during the work cycle, and they use the large play-room, which regularly has role-play and building activities. The hallway/porch is used appropriately to dress the children suitably for the snow. The outside garden area for the toddlers to use is very well resourced with a Wendy house and slide, as well as trees and swings. On the day of the visit the children were digging, and playing in the snow, which was their first experience of winter conditions this year.

The garden generally used by the older children is divided into two large grassed areas with climbing frame and Wendy house. An area to play football is separated from the rest by large plants. A chalkboard, swings and a sand pit are available for the children when the garden isn't covered in snow.

While the individual lead teachers are responsible for resourcing their rooms, all the children take responsibility for keeping their classroom clean and tidy and this is an exceptional aspect of this school.

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

Independence is fostered for the children from the moment they arrive until they go home at the end of the day. The children need help with some of their extensive outdoor clothing but they are given the opportunity to manage their clothes themselves and staff only intervene if they need to. Breakfast and snack are taken when the child feels ready as the nursery operates a rolling snack system. The children help prepare the lunch tables and help themselves to food guided and supported by attentive adults. The small square tables ensure that the children socialise when eating and enjoy the experience.

The children are trusted to access learning spontaneously, and they all show great respect for their environment and each other. They have the freedom to move around the classroom and choose where and with whom they want to work and learn either on their own or in large or small groups.

The toddlers can choose to go outside during the morning, which is a huge asset for their learning and development. All the older children are given time to play outside but this is a group activity at the end of the morning.

Respect for other cultures is an outstanding feature of the pre-school. The bilingual approach and the children's understanding as to which member of staff speaks which language gives them the opportunity to experience different cultures every day. The extensive activities in the 'knowledge and understanding of the world' area in two of the classrooms give the children an opportunity to commune with nature and learn to respect the planet.

The pre-school works with families to help ensure that the level of independence that is established during the day is carried on when the child is at home. Well-attended seminars are offered to the parents to ensure that they know how to foster independence at home.

Montessori Practice: links with parents, including reports and records

The task of record keeping has been made easier with the introduction of the English digital record system, especially for the teachers who are fluent in English. The staff can input photographs, observations and other records. They base their individual planning on the outcomes of the observations using the Montessori curriculum as the next steps guide.

In the classrooms for older children the roles of the two adults are clearly outlined. The lead teacher presents materials, makes observations of the children and plans topics and themes which she shares with her colleague. It is her responsibility to ensure that the children move forward in their education and to decide what materials are on the shelves. The role of the assistant is to support her by having more responsibility for the children's welfare and to contribute to the smooth running of the classroom including

observations. They work more with the children in the creative and 'everyday living area'. By including 'critical insight' in all the observations both adults in the classroom could contribute effectively towards the children's learning and development.

Parents meetings and regular seminars for them are embedded in the routine of the nursery. The parents feel well informed and are able to use the principles of the Montessori ethos at home. They have secure access to their children's developmental plans through the digital system and therefore can follow their child's progress very effectively. Written reports are also compiled regularly in this way.

Staff: qualifications, deployment, and performance management.

The head teacher is responsible for the day-to-day working of the nursery as well as providing support for the parents. She is strongly committed to promoting the Montessori ethos for all ages of children, which is evidenced by the fact that she has opened an elementary school and is undertaking Montessori training for this older age group.

The necessary policies and procedures are in place to help ensure the effective running of the setting and staff appraisal and supervision, while generally verbal, is comprehensive. Both established and new staff members feel very well supported and the induction process is wide-ranging. The staff members know what is expected of them as their roles are clearly defined.

Peer observations are embedded in practice as the head and the lead teachers observe in different rooms. It is recommended that this already good practice is extended to include all the staff working in those rooms. This would give all the adults working with the children the opportunity to examine in depth how their room operates and give them opportunities to suggest and implement any changes that had been identified. This would enhance teamwork and develop shared responsibility for effectiveness of practice.

This well qualified team is predominately Montessori trained and further Montessori training is planned for some of the assistants. The nurses are responsible for the health of the children and are part of the fabric of the school.

This is a charming school in exceptional premises with a demonstrable commitment to Montessori methods and philosophy.

Name of Assessor: Charlotte White (supported by Barbara Isaacs)

Date report submitted: 3 December 2016