

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, a two-day accreditation visit made on behalf of the Montessori Evaluation and Accreditation Board. It considers how far the setting follows relevant criteria in "The Guide to the EYFS in Montessori Settings" (2012/14).

The report does not address the standards and quality issues that are assessed by the Cypriot Ministry of Education and Social Services. Also 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.

Little Gems Montessori Nursery – Nicosia 2 Eantos Street, Engomi/Makedonitissa, Nicosia, Cyprus

Dates of previous MEAB accreditations: 2009, 2012 and 2015

This accreditation is valid until June 2023.

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

Description of the nursery:

Little Gems Montessori Nursery – Nicosia is set in a mainly residential area in the west of the city. It has undergone a few changes since the previous MEAB accreditation. The indoor environment now offers the 3 to 6 year olds complete free-flow between their two classrooms. The nursery's outdoor space continues to offer a rich and relevant learning environment in its own right, with the addition of a wooden house – which boosts the children's opportunities for role-play – and a conveniently located separate allotment.

The setting continues to offer full- and part-time places during term times only and with the same daily schedule. The number of children that the setting is registered for remains at 49, which is also the number currently attending. On the second day of the reaccreditation visit, there were thirty-five 3 to 6 year olds and fourteen 2 to 3 year olds, with all staff present. The children are offered a very healthy morning snack, with local produce offered, and those who attend full-time bring in a packed lunch.

There has been no change to the organisational structure of the setting: the principal is also its owner. She shares her time between this nursery, in which she takes an active role, and its sister setting in Larnaca. She employs seven members of staff. Five hold a BA degree (three of which are in education), three have a Montessori diploma and two are currently studying for a Montessori qualification. Most staff speak more than one language.

Summary

Little Gems – Nicosia has already been MEAB accredited three times. The nursery is well established and continues to show commitment towards ensuring best Montessori practice for the children and their families, with diligence towards this quality assurance process.

The nursery is proud of the provision it offers and of its achievement of having introduced the Montessori approach to education in the island. It continues to provide excellent Montessori education within a welcoming and inspiring environment that truly represents ‘La Casa dei Bambini’, a children’s house. All the children are very comfortable within their surroundings; they use the physical space and every resource with ownership and interest, and often contribute to the making of new materials. Offering full free-flow of movement between the rooms for those 3 years and over has provided an efficient and successful enhancement of the daily routine. It has increased the children’s autonomy, their access to a broader range of resources and their opportunities for socialising.

The Montessori principles of Cosmic Education are embedded in the daily life of the nursery; this is evident through the choice of routine songs, the excellent social and emotional care provided, the recycling programs encouraged and the commitment to support local charitable organisations.

The previous MEAB accreditation’s recommendations have been met. The principal and staff have ensured that the provision for the 2 to 3 year old children includes more resources for physical development, both outdoors and indoors – where there is now a balancing beam. Furthermore, a register with the names and photographs of the members of staff present each day hangs on the outer door, for all parents and visitors to see.

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

- more attention should be given to the order of the Montessori resources on the shelves and staff should ensure that these are fully accessible to children;

- staff should involve the older children in the recording of their own achievements, for example by using tablets or digital cameras, and
- those in the 2 to 3 year old classroom should be offered more opportunity to make choices independently.

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

Philosophy:

Little Gems – Nicosia continues to offer excellent early years provision that applies the Montessori approach to its full value; children flourish in a supportive, caring and stimulating environment wherein each child's uniqueness is nurtured and cherished. The nursery's mission statement can be found in the parents' handbook, in the setting's prospectus and on its website.

Children benefit from many opportunities for freedom, they are trusted in their abilities and are guided to work towards their individual potential; this is achieved in an atmosphere of cooperation, respect and support, evident both amongst children and adults alike. Responsibility for one's own behaviour, for each other and for the environment is a strong feature of life at Little Gems; children are trusted to follow ground rules, to respect the materials and to care for one another. Those sentiments reflect the principles of Montessori's Cosmic Education; which are also extended into the local and wider communities thanks to the dedication and commitment of the principal, who endeavours to involve the nursery in worthwhile causes.

During the reaccreditation visit children were observed following their individual routines, selecting activities from the shelves, as well as designing their own; they were free to flow in between classrooms, and the doors to the outside space were always open. The 2 to 3 year olds followed a more structured routine.

The setting strikes a positive balance between freedom and its boundaries, between individual and group work and in the adults offering timely and relevant guidance. This ensures that children develop in an environment that offers adult-led teaching whilst it also fosters self-discipline, self-assurance and autonomous learning.

Learning and Development:

The children continue to learn and develop following their interests, at their own pace and independently; teachers guide them in their daily activities by providing extra resources as needed and by encouraging problem-solving skills and exploration. The independent learning opportunities are enhanced by the long work cycle, which extends to four hours for the older children. The 2 to 3 year old children are offered a more

structured approach, with more group activities being organised daily to which all these children are strongly encouraged to attend. These offer opportunities for socialising, but staff are encouraged to find a more equal balance with children's independent choice and work.

Planning is undertaken and shared by all staff, and themes/projects are approved by the class teacher; these follow the interests of the children, celebrate local festivals and community life. On occasion, projects run for as long as ten weeks, enabling thorough consolidation of understanding through repetition and focused learning.

As a culturally diverse setting, and given the age range of the children, the staff place particular importance on language development to maximise children's opportunity to absorb their home language and others besides. Children speak their primary languages at the setting, but staff also expose them to an environment rich in the English language. Additional activities such as Little Kickers, Wooden Wizards and music lessons are offered weekly to provide further enhancement to this rich curriculum.

Prepared Environment: resources and materials

The resources and Montessori materials offered by the setting are plentiful and developmentally appropriate for both age ranges. It is clear that this learning environment has continued to develop with time and offers a very good Montessori children's house thanks to the dedication of the principal. The activities and materials are original, many created with much thought and with a personal touch. Children are often encouraged to add to the existing provision with materials of their own making, such as sound cylinders and calendars.

The abundance of these resources at times jeopardizes the order of the shelves and the accessibility of the resources for the children. Staff are encouraged to reassess the quantity and arrangement of the resources in order to maximise children's independent selection and to support their sense of order.

The outdoor environment has a varied range of learning opportunities and, as such, it offers an excellent continuation of the indoor learning provision. There are plenty of activities for mark-making and role-play: on the raised patio there is a blackboard, assorted writing resources and books for inspiration, while on the lower level the wooden house is prepared as a coffee shop. There are lots of intimate spaces created for the children to be alone, or to work in small groups.

In addition to the setting's own outdoor area, once a week the children are taken to a local park for the whole morning session. This undoubtedly offers further opportunities for the development of gross motor skills thanks to its large climbing structures, but the skillful staff ensure that it also enriches cognitive and creative development by using its natural resources and by supplying extra academic materials during the outing. Adjacent to the main building, a small but useful allotment is now used to grow vegetables that are then harvested by the children to cook with. The setting offers a wonderfully rich and interesting learning environment in which the children thrive.

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

All staff understand the importance of young children's need to develop independence. They offer the children freedom of choice and of movement, uninterrupted cycles of activity and a work cycle, and they encourage the children in their self-care.

During the reaccreditation visit, older children were encouraged to follow their own ideas, they were seen concentrating for prolonged periods of time and supported in executing their own plans. This good practice could be extended by encouraging the children to take an active role in recording their own learning.

The extended work cycle is an excellent aspect of practice; at times, this can last for over four hours for the older children. The younger children would benefit from a routine that allows for more free choice of activity. Besides fostering their emerging independence, this will also ensure that the classroom resources are more fully used.

Snack is a welcomed time in all the classrooms. While the older children capably organise this for themselves, the younger children are more closely supported by the adults, however, they are encouraged to serve themselves and clear away afterwards.

Montessori Practice: links with parents, including reports and records

Little Gems – Nicosia continues to value the participation of parents. They are welcomed in the morning by the child's key person, who always dedicates time for sharing information about the child and about the setting's schedule. Collection time is flexible to accommodate parents' needs.

Useful information can be found on the parents' notice board, which is located close to the main entrance for easy access. During the reaccreditation visit, the information parents had here included tips on healthy food, language development, extra-curricular activities and the complete handbook, which is updated yearly.

Community projects are well supported by staff and families. Currently, parents contribute to fund-raising for the local hospital, they have participated in a Family Fun Day in support of the Cyprus Autistic Association, and their awareness of recycling is broadened by the setting.

Each child's progress record is shared securely with their parents through the nursery's digital record-keeping and parent communication system; a Montessori Child Profile or a Transfer Summary is given to parents and to the next school when children leave the nursery.

Parents' wishes regarding their children's learning are taken into account: for instance, despite English being the main language of the setting, staff will support relevant linguistic development at the request of parents, such as in Greek. The principal possesses a nurturing attitude towards parents and their needs; they are guided well in regards to family matters and, for example, in seeking Montessori qualifications. Workshops are organised termly and, during the visit, an evening workshop on the topics of the Mathematical Mind and the Montessori Numeracy Activities was delivered with competency and passion by the principal and a member of staff.

Staff: qualifications, deployment, and performance management

The staff show excellent care and concern for the well-being of all the children; they are committed to providing a child-led education that fully supports holistic development. Staff are enthusiastic, energetic, and sensitive in their interactions with the children, and are cooperative, helpful and accommodating towards each other. Maintenance of resources and responsibilities are shared, communication is effective and respectful and awareness of positive role modelling is a constant feature of their practice. Effective strategies are in place to enable them to adhere to ratio requirements.

The principal demonstrates a commitment to employing Montessori qualified teachers and to providing continuing professional development opportunities, in which the staff eagerly participate. In-house training and attendance at the Montessori Europe Conference are targets set in the nursery's current development plan. The staff's attitude towards personal and professional development is commendable: they welcome thorough peer-observation reviews and appraisals, and carry out regular self-evaluation assessments in which they reflect on a comprehensive list of roles and responsibilities. The staff handbook is thorough, covering both conventional and Montessori topics; it is an informative and useful resource for teachers to access regularly.

Montessori and non-Montessori qualified staff are well deployed within each classroom and in the outdoor environment, to ensure consistency of practice. The nursery has a strong mentoring strategy. It supports the staff in developing and/or refining their understanding of the Montessori philosophy, from their initial induction and throughout their time at the setting, so that they can continue to deliver excellent practice.

Name of Assessor: Michela Castellarin

Dates of visit: 9th and 10th May 2019

Date report submitted: 15th May 2019