

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 far the setting follows relevant criteria in "The Guide to the EYFS in Montessori Settings" (2012/14).

The setting is registered and approved by authorised agencies (Women's Cooperative Day Care Facility) and is run as a Parent Cooperative. This report does not provide any assessment of the national standards that may be required of the setting or of its financial aspects.

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.

Montessori Coop Istanbul

5 Gazeteciler Sitesi, Açelya Sokak No 20/3, Akatlar, Istanbul, Turkey

Date of previous MEAB accreditation: November 2015

This accreditation is valid until December 2022

This accreditation report relates to the provision for children aged between 2 years 8 months and 6 years.

Description of the nursery:

The Montessori Coop Istanbul is located in Akatlar, a residential area on the European side of Istanbul. It is housed in a detached property over three floors with a large, secure, well-resourced garden. The three floors have clearly designated Montessori curriculum learning areas. The Sensorial and Numeracy materials are on the ground floor, Practical Life and Creative activities are on the first floor along with the snack and dining area, and Literacy and Cultural activities are on the second floor. The nursery was established as a not-for-profit parent co-operative in 2013 and a continual reinvestment process is at the heart of its objectives. In September 2015 it relocated to the current premises. The nursery serves both Turkish and expatriate families living in Istanbul.

There are currently 26 children on roll, all attend daily. The children range from 2 years 8 months to 6 years of age; 16 children attend for the morning and afternoon session combined, 08.30 to 16.00, whilst the others go home after lunch at around 13.00. The setting is open for 33 weeks of the academic year and offers a 'summer camp' for the month of July. English is the main language spoken; for the majority of the children this is an additional language and the nursery provides the necessary support to help them settle into the English-speaking environment. It also has access to a range of external professionals to help staff support children with additional learning needs.

The children benefit from well-balanced, healthy, seasonal meals with a vegetarian option, which are provided by the nursery. Each day the children have a morning snack of fruit and vegetables and a two course lunch; those that stay for the extended day have an afternoon snack. The menus are set by the 'parent menu committee' twice a month and where possible are created around locally sourced organic products.

The Steering Committee manages the nursery and employs three qualified Montessori teachers, one of whom is the Head Teacher with day to day responsibility for running the setting. There are also two assistant teachers, one of whom has worked in the Coop since its inception. The nursery is a professional placement venue for student teachers and it also provides intern positions for those who are interested in learning more about the Montessori method. In addition to the five full-time members of the team, the co-operative also employs a cook/housekeeper. All were present for the visit.

Summary

Montessori Coop Istanbul is a vibrant and unique nursery where both the Steering Committee and the teaching staff are committed to providing its children with an authentic Montessori environment and an approach that "follows the child". They believe that each individual, child or adult, has tremendous potential and an essential role to play in the nursery community.

The nursery offers a full Montessori curriculum and children move freely between the floors of the building, eagerly engaging with the wide range of Montessori materials and activities made available to them. The nursery layout and the calm and skilled staff interaction with the children enables them to develop high levels of independence and social confidence. Consideration should be given to reorganising the shelf and table layout in the Practical Life/Creative activities area to allow children to more easily access and make use of the materials.

The morning work cycle enables high levels of concentration as children freely choose resources from the environment. It would be advantageous to the children to consider holding the whole group gathering after outdoor play, prior to lunch, so as not to disrupt children's work flow. Staff members know the children very well and through their daily observations they plan activities that follow the children's interests and they use the materials to effectively help all children to make good progress throughout the curriculum. Children would benefit further from more focused planned learning opportunities and small group sessions during the afternoon work cycle.

Lunch time at the nursery offers the children the chance to socialise and adds to the sense of community the nursery creates. Children help to lay the tables and clear their plates afterwards. Children would benefit from being able to serve themselves lunch and pour their own drinks from jugs placed on each table.

The nursery has a member of staff who has undertaken initial Forest School training. The children benefit from a planned session of Forest School at least once a week, which incorporates the principles of peace and nature.

Following a recommendation from the previous MEAB accreditation the nursery has successfully implemented for the children partial free-flow to the outdoor learning space. This area is set up each day to reflect and expand upon the indoor learning provision and offers activities linked to each of the Montessori curriculum areas. This improvement gives the children the opportunity to freely choose whether they work indoors or out, extending the breadth of their experiences. In addition to the planned outdoor activities, the children have excellent resources here to support their physical development and critical thinking skills, such as a large climbing frame, a climbing wall, a planting garden, mud kitchen and a large area with open-ended play materials, which promote their imaginative play. When possible, the children should have access to the outdoors throughout the whole of the work cycle.

The Steering Committee and the Head Teacher have considered the recommendation made at the previous MEAB accreditation, to establish a toddler class. They do not feel that their current building offers enough scope to do so.

Parents recognise the advantages that the Montessori curriculum gives their children and are generously supporting the nursery to develop and improve. They are appreciative of the wide range of learning experiences their children have access to and very much enjoy being a part of the international community that the nursery has created. The children, staff and parents of the Montessori Coop Istanbul together have a profound global vision. They exemplify the ethos and principles of the Montessori approach to education. All those involved in the setting's achievements to date should be commended for their contribution to this outstanding nursery.

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:

- consider offering an adult-led group activity prior to lunch rather than before outdoor play to give the children a calming period before eating;
- extend planned learning opportunities for the children who stay for the afternoon work cycle, including small group projects;

- review and reorganise the Practical Life/Creative area to provide more accessible work space for the children; and
- implement self-serving for lunch and the use of water jugs on the tables.

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

Philosophy:

Every aspect of the nursery embraces the ethos and principles of Montessori education achieving its aim of providing a meaningful and stimulating early years experience for the children who attend. The staff members' approach to the children's daily experience is founded not only on their thorough knowledge of each child but also on their ever-growing understanding of child development. They offer a nurturing environment where children's interests and actions are understood and provided for. Children benefit tremendously from the vertical age grouping which encourages a caring and harmonious nursery community.

The parents' involvement in the running and management of the nursery also enhances the children's experience. Parents understand the ethos of the Montessori approach and support the aims of the nursery. They extend their children's opportunities to follow their interests and gain independence both in the home and wider environments. Parents and staff have high aspirations for the children which enhances their self-esteem and self-confidence.

The Head Teacher and Steering Committee have established a community that respects childhood in its own right and places the child at the heart of everything it provides. The nursery promotes its practice throughout its website and literature, and actively communicates its approach by working with organisations and interested parties to share best practice. This fosters the continuing professional development of all the staff and their enthusiastic and positive dissemination of the spirit of Montessori education.

Learning and Development:

The Montessori Coop Istanbul provides a learning environment that follows the full Montessori early years curriculum. Children have access to a wide range of Montessori resources that are very effectively supplemented with carefully selected additional educational resources. Staff members carefully plan the whole environment, including the outdoor space where all the areas of learning are clearly visible. Plans for children's learning follow their interests and their progress through the Montessori areas of the curriculum. The adults rotate their work stations so that each member of the team spends approximately two weeks at a time supervising a specific area of learning, this approach leads to very well moderated judgements of children's learning and progress. Staff members astutely recognise and record children's achievements regularly

throughout the day; this information is transferred to the children's development records weekly. The adults work together to plan special projects, for example, the recent World Animal Day resulted in the children building a house for the garden cats to rest in.

Children are free to move between the floors and keenly engage with the materials in all areas of the setting. Staff members discreetly and purposefully direct children towards their next steps in learning and each child benefits from one to one engagement with teaching staff throughout the three hour morning work cycle. Children can be seen in focused activity with staff members as they learn letter shapes and sounds. They also engage in independent learning as they create their own sum sheets and access materials from the shelves to enable them to complete their work to their own satisfaction. Staff members support children's English language use consistently.

As children settle into the morning work cycle the doors to the outdoor space are opened and children are then free to work either indoors or outside. As the work cycle draws to an end children are currently engaged in an adult-led group activity as a transition strategy before whole group outdoor play takes place prior to them gathering to eat their lunch. Consideration should be given to holding a whole group activity before lunch rather than at the end of the work cycle, thereby giving the children the opportunity to settle back indoors before having lunch.

The younger children leave the nursery after lunch and those remaining settle for a brief rest period before engaging in afternoon activities. The afternoon work cycle includes planned enhanced activities where each teacher takes turns in preparing lessons such as cooking or creative/cultural activities related to the project being focused on at that time. The children are free to choose whether they join the activities; however, there is less focus on planned learning at this point and the children are less engaged. Children would benefit from consideration being given to using the afternoon work cycle to focus on smaller group projects or specifically planned extended learning opportunities for each child.

Children make very good progress at the nursery, they gain immensely from the respectful environment the staff team has created and are competent, confident learners right across the age range.

Prepared Environment: resources and materials

Staff members at the nursery have a very good understanding of the Montessori curriculum as a whole and this is reflected in the effective use of space across the three floors of the building. All materials are well cared for, attractively displayed and generally easy for the children to access. Consideration should be given to the rearrangement of the shelf and table layout in the Practical Life/Creative activities area to allow children more space, easier access and thereby further freedom of choice.

The adults have created a good balance between simple, introductory activities and more complex exercises that stretch and challenge the children's critical thinking skills.

Each shelf houses resources that ensure success and progress for every child regardless of their starting point.

Staff members have a great respect for the children's environment and the materials within it and this engenders the same spirit in the children. They eagerly engage in their self-chosen tasks and in those delivered by staff with respect and courtesy for the child's keen attention to learn. Equal care is taken in preparing and equipping both the indoor and outdoor environments. The team is very committed to improving and developing the outdoor space to ensure that it provides the children with large scale learning opportunities that complement the indoor opportunities. Outdoor shelving contains resources that reflect and expand upon the curriculum areas available indoors, and the activities which promote physical development and engagement with the natural world in particular are being extended throughout the school year.

Respect for their environment is evident from the time the children enter the nursery, changing from outdoor footwear to slippers, to them clearing and washing their own plates at mealtimes and in the care with which they tidy their beautiful learning environment.

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

Children at the nursery develop high levels of independence: they are very comfortable managing themselves and their own individual needs. Staff members place great value in supporting the children's independence and will patiently interact with children as they dress themselves and manage their personal hygiene. Everyone is given the time and space to achieve positive experiences of doing things themselves. It is very evident that the children benefit from the trust the staff place in them to take independent action and make their own decisions.

Children follow the cycle of activity, ensuring that they return resources to the shelf ready for the next child to use them. If undertaking large scale activities, the children work together to help one another tidy and roll mats, if a spillage occurs they help one another to restore order. All of the children understand and practise the rules that they have developed as a community and if, on occasion, they forget, they are gently and appropriately reminded by the very observant staff team. Children manage their own behaviour well and if support is needed staff are kind and gentle in offering this.

Each day children volunteer to help set the tables for lunch and lunch itself is a social occasion which the children very obviously enjoy. Children would benefit from being able to serve themselves at their tables, this would allow them to use the life skills they practice in other areas of the setting. They would further benefit from fewer interruptions at mealtimes if jugs of water were placed on the tables rather than each child making their way to a large water dispenser where they sometimes overfill and then spill their drink. Parents place great value on the independence their children develop at the nursery and see this mirrored in their home environments.

Montessori Practice: links with parents, including reports and records

As a parent co-operative, the parent group are very involved with the day to day running of the nursery. Their outstanding commitment to the Montessori approach to education sees the nursery community grow and evolve constantly. The Steering Committee is entirely responsible for the administrative management of the nursery and meets regularly with the Head Teacher to ensure that the nursery is providing the children with all of the resources necessary to ensure that they flourish. Parents appreciate the spirit and sense of community that the nursery engenders and organise frequent family events centred around the children's interests at weekends and during holiday periods. The Head Teacher and staff recognise and appreciate that the relationships they develop with parents are trusting and open.

Parents are provided with a Parent Handbook and invited to an induction evening at the beginning of the academic year, and the event is used to help them to develop a deeper understanding of the Montessori approach. Staff members hold one to one parent conferences twice a year, at the end of the first and third terms. These enable parents to gain a full picture of their children's achievements and progress. In addition, staff members keep detailed records of the children's development. They create an individual observation portfolio for each child, which captures the essence of the child's learning experiences throughout their time at the nursery and provides a written record of the developmental progress made; these are available for parents to view during the parent conferences and passed on to the family when the child leaves the nursery. Where feeder schools require specific styles of reports for children moving on from the nursery the Head Teacher will prepare these individually.

Parents meet with staff daily as they drop off and collect their children, allowing them to learn more about their children's day. Parents can email the Head Teacher and, if necessary, can arrange private appointments with her and their child's key person. The nursery also runs a password-protected Facebook page, where parents can view images of the children engaging in activities and can upload photographs of events that have taken place outside of the nursery. Parents speak very highly of the nursery and value the opportunity it gives them to be involved in their child's early education experience.

Staff: qualifications, deployment, and performance management

The management structure of Montessori Coop Istanbul lends itself to ensuring that children receive a very rewarding Montessori experience during their time there. It was established with the sole purpose of providing a nurturing and authentic Montessori environment to local and expatriate children. These children benefit not just from the Montessori approach to their early years education but also from the enthusiasm and personal investment made by their parents who have created an exceptional model, one which other settings could learn from and emulate.

The nursery is staffed by a well experienced team of teachers who are tireless in their dedication to providing the best possible Montessori experience to the children they care for. Although local professional development opportunities are limited the staff team is keen to continue to learn and develop. The Steering Committee sees staff training and development as a priority and makes provision for staff members to undertake online training and to attend the annual Montessori Schools Association conference held in London. The Head Teacher is currently making arrangements for the non-Montessori qualified staff members to undertake nursery-sponsored Montessori training. She also works closely with other local early years settings in a forum devoted to improving practice and disseminating relevant early years' theoretical understanding and best practice.

Staff deployment is well organised with every member of the team, in rotation, teaching in each area of the curriculum. All staff members understand the expectations of their roles, they have high aspirations for the children and for themselves, are fully engaged in their work, and meet weekly to discuss how they can develop the learning experience they provide. The Head Teacher carries out peer observations, and feedback informs personal development plans for each member of staff. All members of the team participate in a pre-academic year induction which is used as a team development exercise. The Head Teacher and two other staff members hold Montessori qualifications and all except one hold qualifications in fields related to early years care and education.

The Steering Committee and teaching team are an exemplary force, they are completely committed to the children they work with and to providing an exceptional Montessori environment where children thrive in peace and harmony.

Name of Assessor: Deborah Penny

Date of visits: 8th and 9th October 2018

Date report submitted: 12th October 2018