



# **Montessori Evaluation and Accreditation Board**

## **School Accreditation**

This report is prepared following an accreditation visit made on behalf of the Montessori Evaluation and Accreditation Board. It considers how far the school follows the criteria set out by the Montessori Evaluation and Accreditation Board and The Ministry of Social Affairs in Dubai, UAE. The report does not provide any assessment of financial aspects of the school.

### **Gulf Montessori Nursery**

Al Garhoud, Street 20C, Dubai, United Arab Emirates

Date of the accreditation visit: 12 May 2015

Date of previous MEAB accreditation: December 2011

This accreditation report relates to the provision for children aged eighteen months to 5 years of age.

#### **Description of the nursery**

The Gulf Montessori Nursery in Dubai and its sister school in Kuwait (with whom they share the Montessori ethos and the majority of the documentation) is privately owned. It was established in 2000 and offers trilingual provision with teachers speaking Arabic, English and French. It is located in the Al Garhoud area of Dubai, in a converted double story villa, offering accommodation in two large airy and light classrooms, each with access to its own bathroom facilities. There is access to a large garden which has been recently redeveloped and provides a wide range of activities with free flow access from the ground floor.

The nursery has two large classrooms on the ground and second floor each with its own facilities. On the ground floor is a comfortable reception area, a kitchen, dining room and staff room with excellent storage facilities. Currently there are 68 children attending, divided evenly between the two classrooms; the ground floor provides care and education for the younger children from 18 months to 4 years of age and the first floor houses the 3 to 5 year olds. All children attend school five days a week; their day starts at 08:00 and finishes after lunch at 13:30. Some of the younger children leave before lunch. Children bring their own lunch from home; breakfast and snack are provided. There is strong emphasis on healthy eating, with fresh fruit and vegetables being offered for snack every day.

The nursery has facilities to support children with special educational needs. The trilingual approach supports children with diversity of languages, reflecting the international nature of the families living in Dubai.



The nursery employs 16 staff, with all 10 teachers having full Montessori qualifications; they are supported by two qualified nurses and helpers. The experienced Montessori qualified owner employs a Montessori co-ordinator and a head teacher to ensure the smooth running of the setting. There are also currently two administrators, maintenance and security staff, who all contribute to the safe day to day life of the school.

## Summary

Gulf Montessori Nursery, Dubai, offers excellent Montessori provision where children's independence and opportunities to learn from the well-considered favourable environment are valued and celebrated. The leadership of the nursery empowers staff to work as a cohesive team committed to respect for children as unique, capable and active learners.

The learning environment provides many opportunities for learning which unfolds spontaneously and is led by children's interests and individual needs. Staff are unobtrusive and excellent observers committed to supporting children's learning and development. They trust even the youngest children to access the garden, whilst discreetly ensuring they are safe, and create a dynamic learning community both inside and outside.

The communication between staff and children is exemplary and reflects a high level of awareness of individual children's capabilities and needs. This relationship makes a significant contribution towards the calm and purposeful atmosphere in the whole nursery. The children are well settled and happy learners, keen to share their learning with each other and also with the adults in the classrooms.

The school addressed all the recommendations made during the previous accreditation visit.

### **The school provides an education in accordance with the principles of the Montessori approach and environment and merits accreditation by the Montessori Evaluation and Accreditation Board.**

- It is recommended that the school continues to reflect on its practice in order to ensure that high standards are maintained.

#### **Philosophy:**

The aim of the Gulf Montessori nursery is to create a favourable learning environment, where Montessori philosophy is respected and where the areas of learning offer each



child opportunities for development of their unique potential by providing freedom of movement and choice. The team within the nursery gets to know each child by careful and regular observations, identifying their sensitive periods and their readiness for learning and absorbing information.

The teachers follow each child's progress, respecting their individual needs and preparing lesson plans according to individuals' interests and curiosity. They create a calm and harmonious atmosphere which is conducive to exploration and creativity. Physical and intellectual independence are promoted effectively by giving children time to practise newly introduced skills and activities.

The nursery's aims are clearly stated in the prospectus and on the website. They are reviewed regularly by the senior management team and are accessible to parents. The nursery's Facebook is used to share and celebrate children's achievement and to communicate with parents. The effective teamwork of the staff across the whole nursery ensures that the Montessori principle of "following the Child" is honoured, as is evident in the daily life of the school.

### **Learning and Development:**

Both classrooms are organized into Montessori areas of learning, which include activities of everyday living, sensorial education, literacy and numeracy. There is a strong emphasis on learning in the area of knowledge and understanding of the world and on giving children opportunities to express their creativity. The outdoor classroom offers a good range of activities which promote physical development as well as spontaneous role play, and a closeness to and respect for the natural environment. The younger children, in the downstairs classroom, have free access into the garden which they manage independently and confidently and use the facilities with the same level of spontaneity as those available to them inside. The older children, from the upstairs class, use the garden at the beginning of the day, on arrival to nursery.

The children benefit from a three hour work cycle, which starts following a brief morning circle time. The day finishes with lunch. During the morning children engage in spontaneously chosen activities selected across all areas of learning. This choice from a wide range of activities is sensitively guided by adults who know each child's individual interests and capabilities. Children are given time to select, engage and repeat activities which benefit their individual progress. They learn by engaging with learning materials either on their own, with a friend or in small groups. Spontaneous gatherings are organised by attentive and well-prepared adults who make sure they do not disturb the concentration and engagement of the rest of the class. This was observed during the sharing of a floating and sinking activity in the upstairs classroom, where children explored the buoyancy of oranges, some of which were peeled.

The staff's continued observations ensure that developmental needs are met and are based on effective planning which reflects individual interests and capabilities. The teachers in each classroom observe, record and discuss children's learning and



introduce new activities to reflect their interests. The staff's visit to Reggio Emilia nurseries has enhanced the teaching and learning across the nursery with specific emphasis on child-initiated learning. Communication across the whole setting is effective and promotes vibrant learning for the children as well as effective facilitation of learning provided by the adults.

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

The resources and materials provided to support children's learning are plentiful, well organized, accessible and promote individual learning. In addition to the comprehensive sets of materials offered in both classrooms, there are also well maintained nature tables, book and creative areas. Resources which promote role play and enhance the children's understanding of their own and other cultures are extensive and well used by all children attending the nursery. They have opportunities to use light boxes and explore shadows. During the visit these activities were particularly well supported in the downstairs classroom where adults demonstrated how to use them and responded to children's questions in an open-ended manner, so further promoting their communication and language skills.

The large outdoor classroom provides the children with well considered opportunities to paint, climb, dig, garden, role play and experiment with water and sand. The children are trusted to negotiate the three steps which lead into the garden from the downstairs classroom and are effectively supported in their learning by the adults – as was witnessed when one of the children spotted some birds and a teacher offered them some seeds to feed them. The adults' attentive yet not over-bearing presence in ensuring safety and effective support for the children's learning is commendable.

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

Children's independence is valued and promoted across the whole nursery. They are given time to select their own activities and engage with them; this results in competence and autonomy. They are also encouraged and gently reminded to tuck their chairs in and put away their activities. This consistent and calm approach promotes not only independence but also a sense of responsibility for the wellbeing of the whole class and creates a harmonious and industrious atmosphere in both classrooms.

Visiting the nursery at the end of the academic year gave the assessors the opportunity to see just how much the children benefitted from the respect and trust afforded them and from the consistency of approach by all the adults within the team in each classroom. The children are very much in command of their own actions and were able to treat the materials with care and consideration. They are well settled, know the daily



routine well and behave confidently in their choices and in the way they engage in the short circle or small group activities.

Children mirror the respectful behaviours of the adults by being courteous, kind and helpful. For example the older children from the upstairs classroom set the lunch tables in the dining room for the younger children, who in turn help each other with putting away activities and at the snack table.

Parents comment on their children's capacity to do things for themselves and manage their personal hygiene and organise their activities at home. The school's promotional materials, shared with the families and daily contact with staff, further highlight the importance of the children's independence.

### **Montessori practice: Classroom management**

The three hour work cycle fits in well with the daily timetable and gives children many opportunities to engage in spontaneous as well as organized group activities, and in outdoor play. The vertical grouping – from rising 2 to 4 (in the downstairs classroom) and 3 to 5 years of age upstairs – supports the children's learning effectively and offers opportunities for sharing and modeling of positive behavior.

The staff benefit from consistent and considerate leadership and exemplary teamwork. The staff roles are clearly defined in their daily responsibilities for the children and also in relation to classroom maintenance and development of new activities. The individual roles and responsibilities are well outlined in the nursery's policies and procedure. Regular weekly staff meetings further support the effective management of staff and the children's learning.

They observe and record children's progress and use their individual interests to plan further activities. They all contribute towards children's records and participate in preparation of reports for parents; they take photographs and celebrate children's achievements.

The teaching team is supported by a qualified nurse in each classroom who is responsible for the children's health and well being. The nurses are familiar with the Montessori ethos and encourage children to be independent in their personal hygiene.

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

The head teacher is responsible for communication with the parents after discussing with the teachers any concerns they or the parents may have. The school has an open door policy and appointments are made with the administrative team to discuss any



queries they may have throughout the year. When necessary teachers will contact parents to ask for a meeting to discuss their child.

There are two parent/teacher meetings in the academic year during which teachers discuss each child's progress, summarized in a written report. In case of any accident, the nurse provides a written explanation to the parents informing them about the accident and what medication was administered. When a child is absent from school, the nurse is responsible for contacting the parents on the second day of absence to enquire about the child's health.

Communication with parents takes place usually in the form of emails, news updates, permission letters for field trips, or through direct contact as mentioned above. Recently the nursery introduced parents to "quote of the week", sharing with them the principles of Montessori education by posting a quotation from Montessori's writing on at the front door. Parents also have the opportunity to use a "questions box", which is also available at the front door. They are delighted with their children's progress and travel some distance to give their child the opportunity to learn in this happy and very well managed Montessori early years setting.

### **Staffing:**

The nursery benefits from an experienced and well trained team of Montessori teachers who are expertly led by the owner, co-ordinator and head teacher.

The head is responsible for the induction of new teachers and also for day to day academic aspects of nursery life. She guides, facilitates and co-ordinates the excellent team work within the staff. The setting has well-defined policies and procedures relating to staff and their roles and responsibilities. There is also an annual appraisal scheme and opportunities for further training offered locally and also by the Gulf Montessori Centre.

A recent visit to Reggio Emilia has enabled the staff to introduce new ideals into the nursery and gave them opportunities to review the planning and documentation of the children's learning.

The nursery places great importance on the training and qualifications of the teaching team. The owner herself has over 30 years of Montessori teaching experience, is a Montessori trainer, and also has 23 years of management experience. The co-ordinator and head teacher are both Montessori trainers and they use their knowledge and experience to ensure the staff working with children have a sound understanding of the Montessori approach. Ten of the teachers have full Montessori qualifications. There are also currently two administrators, maintenance and security staff who all contribute to the safe day to day life of the school.



The management and staff's commitment to providing high quality Montessori provision for the children attending Gulf Montessori nursery is evident in all aspects of the nursery operations.

Name of Assessors: Penny Johns and Barbara Isaacs

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