



Montessori Evaluation and Accreditation Board

School Accreditation

This report is prepared following two accreditation visits made on behalf of the Montessori Evaluation and Accreditation Board. It considers how far the school follows the criteria set out in "The Program of preschool education RS" (2007) and subsequent revisions. The second visit sought to assess the progress made on the recommendations set out in the report from the first visit as well as any further findings made during the second visit.

The report does not address the standards and quality issues which are the responsibility of the Pedagogical Institute of RS, 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.

Montessori Kindergarten Banja Luka

Grcka 7, Banja Luka 78000, Bosnia and Herzegovina

Date of accreditation visit: 27 September 2016

This accreditation is valid until 31 December 2020

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

Description of the nursery:

Montessori Kindergarten Banja Luka is situated in a quiet residential area in the centre of Banja Luka. It is located on the first and second floor of a rented building of which they have sole use. The nursery has access to and sole use of the garden area at the rear of the building. The first floor is dedicated to the Children's House for 3 to 6 year olds. There is an entrance hall which leads to three good sized open plan rooms that serve as classrooms. The children have direct access to child-sized toilets from the classrooms. The kitchen area next to a small room where the children rest after lunch are also on this level. The second floor, which is at the top of the building, accommodates the toddler group of 1 to 3 year olds. This floor is organized into an office, separate kitchen and toilets and two large open plan rooms.



The nursery is open for 48 weeks of the year and offers half and full day sessions operating from 0800 to 1630 Monday to Friday. There are 22 children on role and on the day of the visit there were 12 children in the Children's House and three in toddlers group. All the toddlers and five children from the older group left after lunch. The youngest child attending on the day of the visit was over 2 years old, and the oldest was 5.8 years old. The daily lunch is planned by a mother volunteer who makes sure the menu is well balanced and it is prepared and delivered by a local restaurant. The nursery also provides and prepares breakfast and afternoon snack.

The nursery offers excellent provision for children with SEND and for those who are not native Bosnian speakers. The nursery is privately owned by the proprietor who first registered the business in February 2015. The proprietor has recently completed her MCI International diploma and works part time in the nursery. In her absence her deputy, who has a degree in Pre-School Education and completed her IMP Montessori training, stands in for the owner. She works in Children's House along with a qualified social worker. In the toddler classroom there is a qualified pre-school teacher and a qualified pedagogue. All staff members were present for the visit.

Summary

Montessori Kindergarten Banja Luka offers every one of its pupils a stimulating, exciting and rewarding learning experience using Maria Montessori's philosophy. The prepared environment gives the children the opportunity to freely follow every part of the curriculum which makes their learning a happy and rewarding experience. Each child's independence is fully supported. They are confident, capable little 'citizens of the world' showing respect for each other, their teachers and their beautiful environment. Learning opportunities are not limited to the classroom: the children go on visits to farms and other interesting places and when visitors come into the school they share their experiences.

The nursery is extremely well resourced with inviting materials which are in very good condition and offer a wide range of aspects of the Montessori curriculum. The parents and staff have an excellent working relationship, which is much appreciated by the families. The committed, enthusiastic staff team, led by an inspirational and dedicated head teacher, work most effectively, always making the needs of the children in their care their number one priority

The school provides an education which follows the principles of the Montessori approach and environment and merits accreditation by the Montessori Evaluation and Accreditation Board. Consideration should be given to the following:

- The outdoor area would benefit from further development to offer the children more learning opportunities throughout the year.



Philosophy:

There is no doubt on entering Montessori Kindergarten Banja Luka that this environment fosters a calm and industrious atmosphere where children are given many opportunities to fulfil their unique potential. Members of staff are unobtrusive in “following the child” and demonstrate clear understanding of the Montessori principles by giving each child freedom within the carefully prepared environment.

The two groups of children are organized in family groupings; the toddlers from 1 to 3 year olds are being initiated into age and developmentally appropriate exercises in the areas of activities for everyday living and early sensorial activities. The older children, from 3 to 6 years old, are independent in their choice of materials and activities. During the visit there were many examples of self-initiated learning and self-discipline across both classes. The staff and children have an excellent relationship, displaying trust in each other and a recognition of their inner needs following their sensitive periods. The philosophy is defined in writing on the website, in the nursery’s written goals and mission statement and in the new parent’s enrolment package. It is reviewed every September at the beginning of the new school year. The quality of Montessori practice is reviewed at the nursery’s regular staff meetings by the whole team.

Learning and Development:

Spontaneous learning takes place throughout the day in each class. The materials for each of the six Montessori areas of the curriculum, exercises for activities of everyday living, sensorial, numeracy, literacy, knowledge and understanding of the world and creativity provide the children with the learning experiences essential for their intellectual and physical development. Due to the layout of the building it is impossible for the children to have open access to the outdoor area but the children go out very regularly in small supervised groups and the nursery makes good use of the facility. On sunny days they eat in the garden.

In the toddler room there are always two staff who encourage the children to develop their independence, even though getting dressed to go outside can take a long time, this is a very rewarding experience for each child as they master putting their boots on the right feet and struggle with the Velcro fastenings.

The staff members downstairs work very well as a team, being ready to help when needed but encouraging the children to try and work out their challenges by themselves. Good observations take place and are recorded throughout the day and these are used for future planning. The classrooms are open plan with divisions between the areas of learning, and the staff move quietly from room to room observing and supporting the children as appropriate. There is a good mix of the children working on their own, being given individual presentations and small group presentations, particularly with the very wide range of cultural materials. The first children arrive just before 8 o’clock and help themselves to breakfast and wash up the plates so that they are ready for the next child. The breakfast table is open until 10 o’clock and is used well by all the children.



The assessor was offered tea by a little boy who insisted that I needed a lump of sugar in my warm chamomile tea served up in a doll's tea set china cup. This experience turned into a science experiment because as he dropped the huge lump of sugar into my mini cup it started shooting out bubbles and melting slowly. There was such excitement around the snack table as the sugar eventually disappeared, and we launched into a deep discussion about things changing from a lump to almost nothing.

The work cycle is just over three hours for the older children and two hours with the toddlers. It includes many planned activities and numerous opportunities for spontaneous learning, as illustrated with the cup of tea. In the toddler unit, the relationship between child and teacher was very caring and a good example of the dedication of this staff member to this age group.

Each week a specialist art teacher and a yoga expert come for an afternoon to work with the children who wish to participate. This term they have a Brazilian person spending one afternoon a week sharing their nationality, customs and information about Brazil with the older children. The under 3s who stay after lunch all sleep in the afternoon. Quite a few the older children also sleep after lunch, and those that do not tend to work in small groups playing dominoes, a shape matching game for four children, and other activities of their choice. The toddlers have their lunch together slightly earlier than those in the Children's House who really enjoy participating in the social experience of sitting on tables of four which they have laid themselves. The teachers sit with the children.

Each child's needs are carefully planned by using the teacher's own observations and the records which are recorded every day on the school's web-based recording system. The planning for outdoor learning could be developed further as the outdoor resources increase.

The teachers record individual progress on iPads that remain in school. The system used provides a great deal of information to help each staff member with their recording of children's progress and personalized planning. The local Education Department requires daily recording of children's progress, as well as evidence of long, medium and short term plans, which are a legal requirement. The entire staff team regularly reviews the effectiveness of learning and development with the help of their web-based system and their own daily experiences in the classroom.

Prepared Environment: resources and materials

This nursery has a stimulating, exciting and beautifully prepared environment which contains a full range of the standard Montessori materials. The activities for everyday living cover over forty different tasks plus the dressing frames, which really prepare the young child for many of the everyday jobs they will come across in their daily life. The sensorial and numeracy areas are well resourced. The literacy area would benefit from more resources to support early word building and early reading activities. The cultural area offers an exceptional range of activities occupying one of the rooms in the Children's House. During the accreditation this was the most industrious area of learning



where children were working individually and in pairs. All the materials are in excellent condition, clean, complete and thoroughly appealing. The outdoor area has only recently been established and is under development. They already have slightly raised beds from which the children have successfully grown, harvested and eaten the produce. There are tracks for little model cars, ride on toys, a mud kitchen and a sand area with appropriate materials. In summer the teachers bring out two large rubber pools which the children thoroughly enjoy. Including a range of activities across all areas of the curriculum will further enhance the nursery's excellent learning activities.

Both floors have designated areas for eating and sleeping. The adults work with the children to maintain the well-considered and accessible environment. The children are often reminded that this environment belongs to them as well as the staff.

Montessori Practice: independence

Every child attending the nursery showed a high level of independence. From the toddlers struggling to put their outdoor clothes and footwear on, to the children organizing which teacher should sit where for lunch. The older children enjoy working through their three hour work cycle engaging with a wide range of exercises and activities; some working on their own, asking for presentations when they need one, or organizing their own small group to play a board game. They prepare their own snack, selecting what they would like for their breakfast; they also clear away and wash and dry up their utensils. They help the staff in clearing the outdoor area at the end of each day.

The staff respect the children and trust them to access their learning spontaneously. Both children and adults show mutual respect and they also respect their environment. It is noticeable how much care the children take when handling the materials. Children from several cultures attend the nursery and this gives the whole group opportunities to engage with the customs of children from other countries, learning to be respectful of each other. They are pleased to learn about how other people in the world live.

During the work cycle the children have the freedom to move around the nursery, to choose the exercises and activities that they would like to do and to repeat them as often as their inner needs dictate.

They have so many opportunities to work either on their own, with a friend or in a small group. The nursery takes every opportunity to work with the parents and to advise them on how to support children's independence at home. There are information evenings and written notes to help them and the families are most appreciative of this advice.

Montessori Practice: links with parents, including reports and records

Each child has a key person who liaises daily with his/her family through a secure digital recording system informing them of what their child has eaten, how the child has felt during the day and what work they have done. This is greatly appreciated by the



parents. The key person participates in the learning of all children in the class but specifically updates the records and planning for their individual key children. The parents are very complimentary about the liaison they have with the school and they feel very well informed about the education and development of their child.

There are two social meetings for parents during the year when the head talks about an aspect of Montessori philosophy. This is a much welcomed opportunity for the parents to meet each other and the staff in a relaxed situation.

The daily details sent home for the under 2s are more focused on their individual needs such as sleeping, toileting and feeding routines. There is a regular newsletter sent out as both email and hard copies. A written report is produced annually at the end of the school year and for children moving on to primary school a comprehensive written report is sent to the parents to forward to their child's new school (the format is provided by the local pedagogical institute). The transition children go in a group to visit the primary school in the summer term. The parents and staff of the Montessori Kindergarten have an excellent working relationship.

Staff: qualifications, deployment, and performance management.

Due to the size of the team at the nursery – comprising the teaching proprietor and her four teachers including her deputy – there is no need for an organization chart at present. All staff members know their responsibilities and the general duties are shared on a rota basis. Daily checks are carried out by the room leaders and other duties are shared amongst the team. They all have access to and are well informed about the policies and procedures. When a new member of staff joins she is given a mentor and receives a very comprehensive induction pack. The development plan is ongoing and it is reviewed and amended as and when necessary. There are monthly staff meetings where notes are taken but formal minutes will be introduced at the next meeting.

There are comprehensive job descriptions and regular staff and peer to peer observations take place. Three staff have BEds in pre school education, one has a degree in social work and the new member of staff is hoping to start a Montessori qualification. The head is determined to have a fully Montessori qualified staff team and she ensures that all staff can take opportunities for appropriate training.

The inspirational and committed head sets an excellent example for her staff members, who work as an enthusiastic, caring and cohesive team, always making the needs of the children in their care their number one priority.

Name of Assessor: Wendy E S Compson

Date report submitted: 2 October 2016