



WIRRAL MONTESSORI ACADEMY

PROSPECTUS

Wirral Montessori Academy

20 Balls Road

Prenton

CH43 5RE

Tel: 0151 363 9330

email: info@wirralmontessori.co.uk

OFSTED Registration Number: EY 545699

At Wirral Montessori Academy, we aim to:

- provide a happy, safe and secure learning environment
- encourage each child to develop lively enquiring minds
- add to the life and well-being of the local community

- encourage each child to think imaginatively, question, and apply themselves to problem solving
- develop physical, social and practical skills
- offer children and their parents a service that promotes equality and values diversity.

We aim to ensure that each child: is in a safe and stimulating environment; is given generous care and attention, because of our ratio of qualified staff to children; has the chance to join with other children and adults to live, play, work and learn together; is helped to take forward his/her learning and development by being helped to build on what he/she already knows and can do; has a key person who makes sure each child makes satisfying progress; is in a setting that sees parents as partners in helping each child to learn and develop.

Parents are regarded as members of our setting who have full participatory rights. These include a right to be: valued and respected; kept informed, consulted, involved and included at all levels.

An Introduction to Maria Montessori, the Montessori philosophy and the Montessori method:

Maria Montessori

Maria Montessori was a highly intuitive woman whose observations of child behaviour and child development continue to hold truths that bear relevance today. Born in Ancona, Italy in 1870 she was very much ahead of her time. In 1896, she became the first woman to graduate as a doctor from the University of Rome. She subsequently went on to delve into paediatrics, psychiatry, psychology and then continued her postgraduate studies specialising in the intellectual and cognitive development of children. Her research took her into the field of education, and it was in 1907 when she was appointed as the medical officer for the Casa dei Bambini (Children's House) that she made some revealing discoveries and significant observations. These led her to mapping out what has now become widely known as the Montessori philosophy.

The Montessori Philosophy

The Montessori philosophy was, and still is, noteworthy for two reasons. Firstly, it was an educational philosophy born out of years of observations that were legitimized by scientific knowledge of child development. And secondly, the children at the Casa dei Bambini responded with such resounding success in

terms of their learning outcomes, that Montessori had concrete evidence that her philosophy held validity when applied.

The Montessori philosophy at its essence is simple. Montessori believed in both sides of the nature versus nurture debate. She believed that children are born with a personality (an intrinsic nature) that would gradually unfold. However, the key in helping a child's personality and intellect reach its full potential was through provision of an enriched nurturing environment.

Montessori having witnessed children in the enriched surroundings that she had created, concluded that all children had within them an innate teacher that would lead them to the acquisition of knowledge and understanding. Montessori labelled this innate ability to learn 'the absorbent mind' indicating that children were like sponges, they learned unconsciously and with minimum effort. All that was required was to provide them with the right surroundings in which learning and development would naturally unfold.

A teacher's role was therefore that of a facilitator, or as Montessori termed a 'director'. A teacher could direct the child in their own learning pathway by preparing the environment and showing the children how to use the learning materials. However, Montessori was adamant that a teacher was not to impose the pace or dictate learning onto a child. To do so was to interfere with a child's natural delectation and appreciation of their surroundings and thereby interfere with a child's sub conscious rhythm of learning.

Accompanying the absorption of knowledge is what Montessori termed 'the sensitive periods.' The sensitive periods are essential to the formation of the mind as they form the drive behind learning and development. During a sensitive period, a child is absorbed and has an unconscious will to participate in certain actions and activities mostly to the exclusion of all others. This is represented by an:

'intense interest for repeating certain actions at length for no obvious reason, until – because of this repetition – a fresh function suddenly appears with explosive force.'

Montessori identified five sensitive periods in which a child's concentration is absorbed by order, an exploration of the environment, movement, an intense interest in tiny objects, and the social aspects of life.

Montessori emphasised the need for educators to pay particular attention to the sensitive periods through equipping a classroom environment appropriately. In doing so the right materials will be at hand in order that a child may find what they are looking for in order to fulfil their individual sensitivities at any given time. Montessori believed this requirement was a necessity for the development of personality and the intellect.

The Montessori Method

The genius of Maria Montessori was that she developed a method through which her philosophy could be implemented. This ensured that, future generations would be served and her philosophy would have longevity. The Montessori method focuses upon how the classroom is organised, and the role of the teachers who prepare it, and work within it. Montessori envisaged that each classroom would be an idyllic environment where children are happy, contented, and learning is taking place. To achieve this desired goal there needs to be certain aspects of the environment that are met. And these are as follows: There needs to be freedom, structure and order, reality and nature, beauty and atmosphere, the Montessori materials, and development of community life.

Freedom refers to giving the child the opportunity and space to develop. Given the right environment and materials the child will have the resources to lead them through a pathway of development which is precisely in tune with their individual pace. It is thus a fulfilment of having their needs satisfied.

Structure and order is an essential ingredient for without it the child would be in chaos, and his development interfered with. Montessori observed how the child's personality unfolds and flourishes amongst order and structure. Intrinsically linked to this order is the work cycle. A cycle begins with a child taking materials to use from the shelf, and then ends with a child returning them back to the shelf. Purposeful activity then has a beginning and an end, and the decisions are made by the child, as to what to pick, he knows where to get it, (as everything in the classroom has a place), and then he is able to sit and work with it till he has decided that he has finished, which is symbolised by him putting it away. Order is crucial to a child's development.

Reality refers to both the concept of moving from the concrete to the abstract, and also learning about real life. If a child were to learn about musical instruments the concrete experience would be to bring the instruments into the classroom. The children would be able to feel them, play them and absorb their reality. Subsequently, the abstract could be introduced where the child is given a picture of the instrument. The picture has meaning because of the child's previous contact with the real instrument. For Montessori understanding is best achieved by always introducing the concrete, and in Montessori classrooms this is achieved through the selection of materials that show the concrete first and then move to the abstract.

Reality also refers to grace and courtesy and the acceptance that there will be a sharing of materials, and having to take turns just as in real life situations.

Understanding social graces of saying please, thank you and sorry all of which are fundamental to human life.

Montessori understood the importance of classrooms having to be inviting places for children. She stressed the importance of vibrancy, bright colours, and wooden materials. All of which add to the beauty of the classroom and capture children's imagination and inspire them to participation and activity. Alongside this a relaxed atmosphere is derived in which children are happy and contented.

The Montessori materials were developed in order to assist a child's self-construction and aid growth. The materials are beautiful and they act as stimuli to capture children's attention, and initiate concentration. The materials move in accordance with a child's development from the simple to the complex and from the concrete to the abstract. They are well placed to meet the child's needs at each of their sensitive periods.

Montessori encouraged the development of community life within the classroom. She stressed that the classroom belongs to the children, and taking ownership of the classroom leads to both order and taking care of each other. Looking after the classroom through putting work away encourages children to keep the classroom neat and tidy. Often in a Montessori classroom if something is spilled the other children nearby will come over to help clear up the mess. The children have a natural interest in looking after their classroom. The care and attention focused upon the classroom is also shown to one another. As the children become familiar with each other through greeting each other in circle, and finding out how everyone is, a sense of community becomes established in which the children are sensitive to one another. They seek help on each other's behalf and show concern for the members of the classroom. Older children are particularly mindful of the needs of the younger children in their class, and exhibit consideration and often display a nurturing side.

Montessori stressed the importance to teachers that, as a pedagogy, the Montessori method was not set in stone. That is, as society changes, teachers need also to change and be innovative in the classroom.

The Montessori educational method has been recognised and valued worldwide for its many benefits. It has enabled children to grow harmoniously in accordance with their nature. It has given many the foundations for a future path of learning and success. And above all it has done all this through fostering a positive, and holistic, approach.

CHILDREN'S DEVELOPMENT AND LEARNING/CURRICULUM: Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) within the Montessori Environment

The National Curriculum for 0-5years is the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS).

Although we are a Montessori school we nevertheless have to cover the EYFS as we are also a Registered setting, and are open to inspection by Ofsted. This, in practice has little impact as the Montessori method covers and in some respects, extends the six areas of learning outlined in the EYFS. As a simple outline the EYFS is covered in the following way at Wirral Montessori Academy:

Personal, social and emotional development:

Being part of the Montessori classroom community, Practical life activities, Grace and Courtesy, Ground rules, Role modelling by peers and adults, Freedom of choice enabling healthy sense of independence and the care of oneself.

Communication, Language and literacy:

Freedom of speech, Circle time, Opportunities for dialogue, Opportunities to develop listening skills, and vocabulary, Pre-literacy skills with emphasis on phonics, Literacy activities, development of general skills leading to writing, A language-rich environment.

Problem solving, reasoning and numeracy:

All areas of the classroom give children opportunities for problem-solving and reasoning by virtue of the autonomy they are encouraged to access in the environment in addition to the following: Exploration of the environment, Sensorial education and activities, working with shapes, sizes and patterns, Cultural activities, Counting activities in a mathematically-rich environment.

Knowledge and Understanding of the World:

Cultural activities, Exploration of our environment both inside and outside, Social graces, Special topics, Sensorial activities, Care of the environment.

Physical Development:

Children develop gross and fine motor skill, a high degree of hand-eye coordination and balance through practical life activities as well as; Sand play, Accessing the washing hands basin, Accessing the snack table, Play in our outdoor area, using the ride on toys, playing with hoops and balls and working through play stations, Creative activities.

Creative Development:

Individual children, small groups and sometimes the whole group engage in freely-available activities such as; Art and crafts, Music and movement, Drama and story-telling, Spontaneous role play usually occurring in a practical life area, cultural area and/or during outdoor play.

We encourage each child to develop moral values, knowledge of and respect for their environment and for people of similar and different backgrounds, cultures and beliefs.

OUR APPROACH TO LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT AND ASSESSMENT:

Learning through play or 'work':

In the Montessori classroom, play is referred to as 'work'. This enables the children to build up a positive approach to work, and the activities undertaken in the classroom. Such activities help young children to learn and develop through doing and talking, which research (now supporting the Montessori philosophy) has shown to be the means by which young children learn to think. Our setting also uses the practice guidance Early Years Foundation Stage to guide our planning and help children to make progress in each of the areas of learning and development. In some of these activities children decide how they will use the activity and, in others, an adult takes the lead in helping the children to take part in the activity.

Assessment:

We assess how young children are learning and developing by observing them frequently. We use information that we gain from observations, as well as from photographs or videos of the children, to document their progress and where this may be leading them. We believe that parents know their children best and we ask them to contribute to assessment by sharing information about what their children like to do at home and how they as parents are supporting development.

We make termly assessment summaries of children's achievement based on our ongoing development records. These form part of children's records of achievement. We undertake these assessment summaries at regular intervals as well as times of transition, such as when a child is moving onto school.

Learning Journals:

Wirral Montessori Academy keeps a learning journal for each child. On entry, each child is given a book in which observations and work are recorded along with an assessment form for each term. Staff and parents working

together on their children's learning journal is one of the ways in which the key person and parents work in partnership. Your child's learning journal helps us to celebrate together his/her achievements and to work together to provide what your child needs for his/her well-being and to make progress.

Your child's key person will work with you to keep this record. To do this you and she/he will collect information about your child's needs, activities, interests and achievements. This information will enable the key person to identify your child's stage of progress. You and the key person will then decide on how to help your child to move on to the next stage.

Working together for your children the ratio of adults to children in our setting is set through the Welfare Requirements as follows: - 2 years of age= 1 adult: 4 children; 3-5 years of age = 1 adult: 8 children or 1 adult:13 children (if qualified teacher status)

However, we always aim to have higher ratios than those standards. This helps us to give time and attention to each child; talk with the children about their interests and activities; help children to experience and benefit from the activities we provide; and allow the children to explore and be adventurous in safety.

The staff who work at our setting are: Sharon Willoughby, Ann Kelly

How parents take part in the setting:

Our setting recognises parents as the first and most important educators of their children. All of the staff see themselves as partners with parents in providing care and education for their child. There are many ways in which parents take part in making the setting a welcoming and stimulating place for children and parents, such as: exchanging knowledge about their children's needs, activities, interests and progress with the staff; sharing their own special interests with the children; helping to provide, make and look after the equipment and materials used in the children's play activities; taking part in events and informal discussions about the activities and curriculum provided by the setting; joining in community activities in which the setting takes part; and building friendships with other parents in the setting.

To help parents understand our aims and methods, a celebration will be held once a term. This will be a small presentation by the children based upon the work that they have done that term. After the presentation, the 'celebration' will take on a more social aspect. A 'pot-luck lunch' will be served and there will be ample opportunity for parents to mix with staff and each other.

In addition, parents who have particular questions or concerns are encouraged to arrange a personal appointment with the owner – Sharon Willoughby. All parents are welcome to visit with us at some time during the term.

Key persons and your child:

Wirral Montessori Academy uses a key person approach. This means that each member of staff has a group of children for whom he/she is particularly responsible. Your child's key person will be the person who works with you to make sure that what we provide is right for your child's particular needs and interests. When your child first starts at the setting, he/she will help your child to settle, and throughout your child's time at the setting he/she will help your child to benefit from the setting's activities.

Learning opportunities for adults:

As well as gaining qualifications in early years care and education, the setting staff take part in further training to help them to keep up-to-date with thinking about early years care and education. The setting also keeps itself up-to-date with best practice in early years care and education, as a member of the National Day Nursery Association.

WIRRAL MONTESSORI TIMETABLE AND ROUTINES:

The session:

We organise our sessions so that the children can choose from and work at a range of activities and in doing so, build up their ability to select and work through a task to its completion.

The Montessori method believes that all children should make their own decisions within the learning environment to build up confidence and self-esteem which leads to a sense of achievement and a sense of healthy independence. In this respect, they are encouraged to choose/change activities which are accessible to children at all times.

EXAMPLE SESSION:

Children are welcomed into the Academy Circle Time. Every child is welcomed and asked for any news. Within the circle we discuss a topic e.g. the solar system, dinosaurs, etc.

Montessori 'Work Cycle': Every child is able to go into the environment and select an activity to work on e.g. number rods, puzzles, painting, sand play.

Break Time: The children are encouraged to either listen to a story or have free play in our outdoor area.

Focus Time: Within the Montessori day there is a focus to some sessions and children are encouraged to take part in this, for example, music and movement, physical development.

Snack Time:

In keeping with the Montessori method during the morning and afternoon sessions the children are free to access the snack table at any time. The snack table contains fruit/vegetables, milk and water. For children who attend a full day session lunch time will be 12.00-1.00pm. (Parents must provide a packed lunch).

Please tell us about your child's dietary needs and we will make sure that these are met.

Policies and Procedures:

Copies of the Academy's policies and procedures are available for you to see at the setting and on our website. The setting's policies help us to make sure that the service provided by the Academy is a high quality one and that being a member of the setting is an enjoyable and beneficial experience for each child and his/her parents.

Safeguarding children:

Our setting has a duty under the law to help safeguard children against suspected or actual 'significant harm'.

Our employment practices ensure children against the likelihood of abuse in our setting and we have a procedure for managing complaints or allegations against a member of staff.

Our way of working with children and their parents ensures we are aware of any problems that may emerge and can offer support, including referral to appropriate agencies when necessary, to help families in difficulty.

Special Needs:

As part of the setting's policy to make sure that its provision meets the needs of each individual child, we take account of any special needs a child may

have. The setting works to the requirements of the 1993 Education Act and The Special Educational Needs Code of Practice (2001).

Our Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator is Sharon Willoughby.

Parents' Complaints:

Any complaints should be made in the first instance directly to Sharon Willoughby and every effort will be made to deal with the matter swiftly in a fair, unbiased and satisfactory manner. If parents are, however, not satisfied with the actions taken by Sharon Willoughby or any member of staff, they should call OFSTED's Early Years Complaints Helpline on 0300 123 1231 or 0161 618 8524 for text phone/Minicom users or Type talk Prefix 18001 about children's services or any other aspect.

Or write to: National Business Unit, Ofsted, Piccadilly Gate, Store Street, Manchester, M1 2 WD

Starting at Wirral Montessori Academy:

We want your child to feel happy and safe with us. To make sure that this is the case, the staff will work with you to decide on how to help your child to settle into the setting. We have a policy about helping children to settle in. A copy of this is available from Sharon Willoughby.

Wirral Montessori Fees:

For your child to receive the greatest benefit from the Montessori method of education they must attend for a minimum of 5 sessions per week. Fees must be paid a month in advance. Fees must still be paid if children are absent, without notice for a short period of time. If your child has to be absent over a long period of time, talk to our Directress. For your child to keep his/her place at the setting, you must pay the fees. Funding is available for 3 and 4 year olds for up to 15 hours per week. Where funding is not received, then full fees apply.

Hourly fee is £8.50. For further information please contact our manager Mrs Willoughby.

Notice of Withdrawal:

A month's notice of withdrawal is required. Otherwise, a full month's fees will be charged. Notice must be in writing to the Owner to be received on or before the first day of the month at the end of which the pupil is to be withdrawn.