



## Frequently Asked Questions

### **Is BMS accredited?**

The school is registered with the NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA) until 2020 for delivery of the curriculum from Kindergarten to Year 6. The school complies with the requirements of the Department of Education and Communities as outlined in the National Quality Framework.

The school subscribes to the Montessori Australia Foundation and reached the highest tier with the Montessori Quality Assurance Programme as is demonstrated by the inclusion of the logo on this letterhead. The Montessori Australia Foundation is the key body in Australia advocating for Montessori education especially when liaising with the Government.

The Montessori Australia Foundation is affiliated member of the Association Montessori Internationale (AMI)

The school is a member of the Association of Independent Schools (AIS).

### **Who runs the school?**

The Avalon Montessori Association is a not for profit public company with a Board of Directors. The Board is elected from the members of the Association at the annual AGM.

The company (Avalon Montessori Association) operates the Barrenjoey Montessori School. The day to day management of the school has been delegated to a Montessori Principal appointed by the Board. The Board meets regularly to ensure compliance and financial responsibility but more importantly to achieve the Vision and Mission of the school. A 5 year strategic plan is the basis for determining initiatives.

The school enjoys a vibrant community of parents who contribute in varied and diverse ways. Social and Fundraising events are held regularly to promote partnerships between the school, parents, families and community.

### **Are the teachers qualified?**

All the class directors and the Principal hold Montessori qualifications and teaching degrees (or equivalent) relevant to the ages that they are teaching. All teachers are recognised by the Institute of Teachers (NSW)(NESA). The teachers and assistants also hold diverse skills and knowledge with recognised qualifications to ensure optimal learning environments and curriculum delivery.

### **What about children who commence after the age of 3?**

A Montessori education is built upon stages of development. The experiences of the child during the first stage affect development at the next and subsequent stages. Therefore the curriculum at each level uses the foundation learning and experiences of the previous levels.

Ideally the child participates in the full continuum of the Montessori programme to maximize their development commencing in the Preschool (Children’s House) at 3 years old or prior to this in an Under 3s Montessori learning environment.

**However** any exposure to the Montessori experience and learning environments will benefit the child due to the unique structure of the curriculum and the multisensory environment and therefore we do accept children of all ages following a ‘compatibility discussion’ with the parents.

**Where does a child go after BMS?**

Prior to 2012 the children left the school to attend wide and diverse primary schools. With the introduction of the Montessori Primary classroom in 2012 we envisage that many students will continue until through until the end of their primary years (Year 6). Students will have the option of enrolling in Government or non-government high schools.

**How is Montessori so different from an education in mainstream schools? (Generic)**

<b>Montessori</b>	<b>Traditional</b>
Children learn via interaction and discussion	Passive learning (to a greater or lesser extent)
Multi-age grouping	Single year group (typically)
Individualised lessons -No standardised worksheets	Group lessons predominantly
Specialised materials	Books and some materials
Child works at own pace	Teacher sets the pace
Environment and method encourage self-motivation and self-discipline	Teacher is the enforcer of discipline
Teacher engages child’s interest	Typically it is the teacher who delivers prescribed lessons

**Do the children participate in music?**

All aspects of the NSW ‘mainstream’ curriculum are incorporated into the integrated curriculum. This means that there is not necessarily a set music time but rather it occurs during the week when there is an interest or topic that calls for aspects of music. Just as there is a Montessori curriculum for other areas of the curriculum there is also a prescribed set of skills and knowledge outcomes that use specific Montessori materials to ‘teach’ music. The areas covered in the music curriculum include, but are not limited to, singing, music appreciation, music literacy, rhythm and playing of instruments.

**Do the children participate in sport?**

BMS uses a Living Life Well approach and the Fundamental Movement skills program for all children with regards to health and gross motor development. Initially the students are taught developmentally appropriate skills which include activities involving movement and hand/eye coordination. These skills are built upon and in primary each term has a specific focus. We endeavour to deliver exposure to many ‘sports’ and some basic acquisition of the skill however emphasis is also placed on being a member of a team. There is a non-competitive element to all sports during the lessons. Again all aspects of the ‘mainstream’ curriculum are incorporated into the integrated curriculum. Sports experienced by the primary students have, over the years, included tennis, T-ball, running and athletics, water safety and swimming, kayaking and surfing.

### **How does the specialist teacher work**

Specialists are rarely found in the 3–6 classroom as a child’s sense of order at this age is still very strong with the focus on independence and concentration. External schedules are detrimental to this process. Specialist teachers are introduced if they can enhance the curriculum for the primary aged child without detracting from key components – namely the 3 hour work cycle. (Typically language, sport require the services of specialist teachers).

### **Does the school enrol children with specific needs?**

The Montessori environment is ideal for children with specific needs since the emphasis is on the individual with skills and concepts being presented during individual lessons within a social environment. The multi age groupings present a vast array of skills and behaviours ensuring that each child to be accepted and respected. The directors are familiar with working and liaising with external specialists either during or after school hours. Visiting allied health specialists may also work with the children during the school day in the classrooms. Supplementary numeracy and literacy programmes are integrated into the school day for individual students who need extra assistance and the class directors liaise with parents and specialists should any learning difficulties be evident. Parents are included in all aspects of this arrangement and in some cases might need to finance the extra support.

### **How does the school ensure and report that my child is achieving to the appropriate educational level.**

The Montessori National Curriculum has been recognised by ACARA (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority) as an alternative curriculum framework. That having been said the NSW Education Standards Authority delivers a curriculum specific to the State (ie not the National Curriculum) and therefore the Montessori National Curriculum has been ‘married’ to the specific outcomes as outlined by the NESA. Detailed observations, tracking documents and checklists ensure that each child covers all areas of the curriculum and bi-annual reports are provided to parents with students in Kindergarten and above providing both a grade and a narrative.

### **Do you have computers in the classroom?**

There are no computers for student use in the 3 – 6 classrooms. The students in the primary classrooms utilise computers for story writing and research with adult supervision. The usage and frequency increases as the students progress through the primary years. Children of the younger age need to absorb information using a multi-sensory approach and the activities of practical life prepare their hands for refined fine motor work. The younger primary student also benefit from problem solving and time to reason and explore using a multisensory approach as well as opportunity to develop a strong hand via writing practise.

IT and tools are enhance the learning opportunities in all the environments e.g. digital cameras, iPads

*Maria Montessori's view on the learning child sees not so much the task of filling the mind with information, but rather of constructing the mind through activity according to inner directives and urges. For children age six and older, the computer can be a very positive part of the environment, but it is still important to decide what to do with it. Such a decision should be carefully based on the children's developmental needs and their well-being. —Dr. Peter Gebhardt-Seele, physicist, computer author, Montessori teacher-trainer*

Further readings: Montessori The Science behind the Genius (Lillard).

### **Montessori and Religion**

BMS is a secular education system, similar to the government sector with no specific denomination practised or taught as part of the curriculum. Respect is a key component in a Montessori classroom - respect for the child, respect for the environment, respect for others and respect for oneself.

Religious education is presented from both a cultural and sociological point of view. Children are invited to explore cultures throughout the world gaining the diversity of viewpoints in our global world. Many Montessori schools celebrate holidays, such as Christmas, Hanukkah, and Chinese New Year, which are religious in origin, and are now integrated into the culture as special days of family feasting, merriment, and wonder.

While Montessori does not teach religion as a separate subject, we place great emphasis on the importance of values and morals, presenting stories and lessons to demonstrate the importance of culture, respect and acceptance in a non-judgemental way. Children are encouraged to express their needs and feelings, their thoughts and perspectives in a safe and supportive environment leading to deep thought and consideration. (Please see the BMS Multicultural statement for further information)

### **Is Montessori opposed to competition?**

In Montessori we are encouraging students to learn to collaborate rather than to compete against each other. For this reason Montessori is often noted as an education for the 21st century.

Students discover their own innate abilities and establish a strong recognition of their own independence, self-confidence and self-discipline. The environment facilitates each child to learn at their own pace and to strive towards improvement, realising that making mistakes is part of a learning process without fear of humiliation by other students.

Children naturally 'compete' with each other both in the playground and classroom. Dr Montessori approved of competition in principle but did not promote external competition as a means of motivation or for others to assess achievements. Consistent with the principles students learn because they are curious and interested and therefore the learning has a deep and profound impact on the child. Montessori allows competition to evolve naturally amongst the students with each child voluntarily making a choice to compete rather than having it imposed by external means e.g. compulsory competitive activities and sport.

### **How can we learn more about Montessori and what happens in the classrooms?**

The indoor and outdoor learning environment have been created and prepared to meet the needs of the children. The physical space and furniture has been designed for use by the children. The presence of adults wandering around the room can challenge the sense of order, the flow of work and the social dynamics of the children. That having been said parents, carers and other visitors are very welcome and proactively requested to observe the classroom communities by sitting on an allocated 'observer's' chair. Parent observations are one of the most essential forms of parent education and the school actively encourages parents to observe and to discuss their observations with the director at a suitable time.

All parents are asked to attend the Parent Education Sessions which cover specific areas of the curriculum, the materials and general discussions based on the Montessori pedagogy that might assist parents at home.

### **What is the Montessori approach to assessment and reporting?**

Montessori education is specifically non-competitive, and avoids the use of rewards and punishment in favour of encouraging an intrinsic motivation for learning. Activities are open-ended, encouraging exploration and creative thinking, and as such do not lend themselves to grading.

Children work in three year age cohorts, in specifically prepared environments which contain materials designed to foster the achievement of appropriate developmental milestones, and the sequential mastery of skills and concepts across the range of disciplines. The didactic and self-correcting materials provide ongoing feedback to the child and trained Montessori directors on a daily basis with developmental milestones, skills and knowledge being assessed and recorded by the director. There is a strong emphasis on individual interest and therefore individualised teaching with the understanding that children do not achieve developmental goals, skills and concepts in a linear pattern. Children need to work at their own pace, benefiting from the opportunities the three year age range provides: learning from and teaching each other whilst being inspired and valued by others. That having been said it is the responsibility of the director to ensure that all children cover all required areas of the curriculum.

Primary children are able to take ownership of their own progress through their daily work journal, regular individual conferences with their teacher, by requesting specific lessons as the need arises, and by maintaining portfolios of completed work. The schedule of learning becomes the responsibility of the child and the teacher, with detailed daily observations of each child noted by the teacher, forming the basis of reporting to parents.

Such reporting is individualised, highly detailed, and focused on the strengths of the child whilst noting areas which require further development and/or remedial expertise. Grading and comparative reporting, which ranks a student's achievement against the performance of other members of the class, is not compatible with Montessori philosophy and practice.

Not only is comparative reporting often misleading for parents, and a cause of unwarranted anxiety, it is discouraging for students who score "poorly", detrimental to both their self-esteem and their willingness to persist, as well as potentially negative for those who do "well" by encouraging the valuing of high scores over the inherent satisfaction of learning.

In Montessori multi-age classrooms, all students are aware of their fellow students' abilities and are comfortable with working at their own pace. The achievements of others are not seen as threatening, but rather as something to which to aspire and celebrate. Children realise that individuals achieve mastery in certain areas at different times and in different ways. As a result, they are encouraged rather than discouraged, and ready to continue to tackle, rather than to avoid, learning challenges.

Moreover, comparative reporting is not achievable in practical terms in Montessori schools, given the three year age cohorts with which we work, and our often small class and school sizes. Comparing children for a particular year within that three year age range will, in most cases, be statistically insignificant as the numbers in each "year" are small (often less than 10) and children within each year are not all learning the same concepts at the same time.

The school participates in NAPLAN with the emphasis being on the process involved when a request is made to externalise knowledge at a certain point in time. It is seen as part of the approach to an 'education for life'.

The director evaluates each student's work in the following ways:

- Observing the child's contributions during a group or individual lesson.
- Observing whether the child uses the materials to consolidate skills and knowledge.
- Holding a discussion with the child around the child's work.

Records are kept of all concepts presented to each student, all material practiced, and all concepts understood by the child. Evaluation of observations can be used to:

- Provide information on the child's progress to parents and to enable appropriate planning.
- Assess the child's interests, skills and strengths as a guide for other teachers when the time comes for the child to move on to another class or school.