

Alongside the EYFS, Kingston Vale Montessori also implements the Montessori approach to education.

About Montessori Education

Education is a natural process spontaneously carried out by the human individual, and is acquired not by listening to words but by experiences upon the environment. The task of the Montessori teacher becomes that of preparing a series of specially designed activities, spread over a specially prepared environment, and then refraining from obtrusive interference.

Maria Montessori, Education for a New World

Maria Montessori, born in 1870, worked in the fields of psychiatry, education and anthropology. She believed that each child is born with a unique potential to be revealed. Her main contributions to early education today include:

- Children are competent learners from birth to six years old age and they can learn almost anything provided special techniques are used.
- Children learn through their senses.
- Preparing the most natural and life supporting environment with a variety of activities fosters a curiosity to learn and independence
- Observation is the key way to assess young children learning
- Continually using observation to adapt the environment allows the child to fulfil his or her greatest potential physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually.
- Freedom to choose the activities they wish to work with and to complete them in their own time develops great powers of concentration and results in a confident learner.

A Beginner's Guide to the Montessori Classroom

In a true Montessori classroom the child's freedom, dignity and independence are of paramount importance. The general atmosphere of a Montessori classroom is of children doing things for themselves carefully and competently - carrying furniture, setting tables, pouring drinks and washing their hands - and engaging in activities which absorb and interest them.

The prepared environment encourages the child of 2 to 5 years of age to absorb information as a natural and joyful activity. The Montessori materials help to stimulate and develop a number skills encouraging learning through our senses. Age appropriate exercises assist the child in developing mastery of coordination and movement, learning about social relationships, and caring of self. The Montessori curriculum areas include:

Practical Life

The very first activities children take part in; in practical life they develop their ability to look after themselves and their surroundings. They can practice dressing skills on specially made frames. They use little jugs filled with beans or rice and then water to practice pouring; they spoon, scoop, or use droppers, tweezers and even chopsticks to transfer from one bowl to another.

Other activities use scaled down versions of real equipment: brushes and brooms, washing-up bowls and clothes. There are also varied opportunities for pairing socks, polishing shoes and mirrors, plaiting and sewing - even packing a tiny suitcase.

Sensorial

On the Sensorial shelves there will be specially designed materials to encourage development of the senses, such as the pink tower; sets of cylinders graduated in size; cylinders with knobs which have to be fitted into the right holes in a block; rough and smooth tablets in boxes; smelling bottles; fabrics to sort by touch; sound boxes to discriminate different sounds; puzzle blocks called the binomial and trinomial cubes. Each of these is used to stimulate and refine one of the five sensory areas and each will be presented to the child to be used in an exact way to aid his or her development. The sensorial materials also prepare the child for reading and writing and mathematical concepts. They also refine and develop hand eye co-ordination and fine motor skills.

Cultural Subjects

The Montessori curriculum also provides a sound introduction to science, botany, zoology, geography, Spanish and history. The cultural studies are approached through time lines, maps, and project work. On festival days schools may celebrate with tastes of exotic foods, learn songs from other countries or invite a guest or parent to show and tell about special costumes and celebrations. Nature walks encourage the children to become aware of their natural environment.

Mathematics

Children gain a physical impression of size and quantity long before they begin to manipulate numbers by handling number rods, counting out beads, counting spindles into boxes and arranging coloured counters in patterns - odd and even numbers. Numbers are built up using glass or wooden beads and their sandpaper symbols traced with the fingers. 6

Language

Writing often comes before reading in a Montessori classroom with children building up their first words phonetically using cardboard letters.

The reading programme progresses through three levels: pink, blue and green - reading materials are colour coded for each level. Inside a small pink box a child finds a tiny toy dog. She takes it out, says the word, listens to the sounds in it and then

seeks out the letters, which make those sounds to build the word. Colouring intricate shapes drawn with insets learns writing skills, and sandpaper letters are experienced by touch as well as by sight and sound. A wide range of story and reference picture books are always available in the classroom.

Social Skills

Children aren't born with an innate knowledge of why we shake hands, or kiss, or rub noses depending on our culture and in the Montessori classroom they learn appropriate greetings. As they become aware of other cultures they are encouraged to celebrate differences and value them equally. During circle time children are shown how to move quietly and carefully around the classroom, push in chairs, wait patiently and politely to gain someone's attention and are reminded how important it is to allow others to work undisturbed. These ground rules in the classroom give every child total security. Children also learn to notice if somebody needs help and that nobody is too small to be useful. Other activities we provide like music and art, develop the child's aesthetic sense.

Our approach to learning, development and assessment

Learning through play and a structured environment

Play helps young children learn and develop through doing and talking. At Kingston Vale Montessori we offer a completely equipped Montessori environment as well as a range of other play activities, for example, role play area, craft activities, etc which help your child make progress in each area of learning and development. In some of these activities children freely choose and will decide how they will use the activity and, in others the adults takes the lead in helping children take part in the activity.

Assessment

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

We make periodic assessment summaries of children's achievements based on our ongoing developmental records. These form part of your children's records of achievement. We undertake these assessments regularly, including times of transition, such as when a child goes to school.

Records of achievement

The setting keeps a record of achievement for each child. Staff and parents work together on their children's records and this is one of the ways in which the key person and parents work in partnership. Your child's key person keeps this record up to date 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 and development and to determine the next steps in their learning. This information is shared with parents at regular parent/teacher meetings.