

## **Wharfedale Montessori School**

### **Our aim and mission statement**

**Choosing** the right School and learning environment for their child is probably one of the hardest decisions a parent has to make. It is even harder when faced with so much debate and division over the rights or wrongs of tests, league tables, and general shifts in education policy. At Wharfedale Montessori School our aim is to enable children to achieve their full potential, to be happy, to grow in knowledge and confidence, to have a good self-image and eventually to be able to go out into a fast changing problem-laden society confidently with well-developed skills, initiative and enthusiasm; able to find their place, enjoy it and do well.

Our school offers places for children from two and a half to twelve years of age, and is situated in one of the most beautiful parts of Wharfedale, in a setting adjacent to Strid Wood SSSI (site of special scientific interest).

The School has two main sections; pre-primary at Strid Cottage and Primary in a custom built log cabin building from scandinavia set in the school grounds. Pupils who enter at around three years old normally spend the first three years of their school life in the Children's House and transfer to Primary around the age of six. The time of transfer depends not only on academic progress but also on a child's personal social and emotional development.

### **The Montessori Approach**

**Montessori** education, with its emphasis on the unique qualities and needs of each individual and its recognition of the different paces and work patterns of each child, begins with the child's imperious need to learn by doing. At each stage in the child's mental growth corresponding occupations are provided by means of which the child develops its faculties. It offers a maximum of spontaneity, enabling children to develop the concentration needed for effective learning. Each child works at his or her own pace; the quick child is not held back by the slow and the latter, in trying to keep up with the former, is not obliged to flounder along hopelessly out of his/her depth.

**Children** at Wharfedale Montessori School enjoy the freedom of choice of work within a carefully structured environment. They work with the guidance and direction of highly qualified directresses or directors (the name for teachers in Montessori Schools). A superbly designed range of teaching apparatus enables the children to develop a deep understanding of a subject. They learn not just how to get something right but to understand on a deeper level why it works the way it does. Montessori presents endless opportunities among the children for mutual help which is joyfully given and gratefully received, allowing all to reach higher levels of scholastic attainment.

**The** Montessori approach develops the whole personality of the child; not only the intellectual faculties but also the powers of deliberation, initiative, and independent choice together with their emotional complements. By living as a free member of a real social community the child is trained in those fundamental qualities which form the basis of personal fulfilment.

## **The Montessori Curriculum**

In pre-primary, children aged two and a half to six begin with the exercises of practical life; sweeping, polishing, pouring, tying bows. These give confidence and manual dexterity as well as providing a link with familiar activities which Mummy and Daddy do at home for new youngsters, but more importantly they steady and settle all children so they are ready to begin real learning.

The next step is to work on sensory perceptions, now recognised by educators everywhere as vital in understanding the concepts later to be used in intellectual learning. The children learn the differences between hot and cold, heavy and light, big and small, and the words to fit these ideas; they sort things into pairs and arrange things in series and learn by playing, as it seems to adults. All this of course alongside the ordinary nursery school pursuits of cutting, pasting, painting, hearing stories, looking at picture books and learning to get along together.

Sometime during their second or third term, typically, the children begin learning about maths, language, history, biology, geography, music - all the national curriculum subjects so talked about recently, all around in Montessori schools since the 1900's and still going strong. Of course they do not learn as you or I might; every mathematical principle or reading skill is catered for with a special piece of equipment, attractive to use and so easy the children become adept at spotting and correcting any little mistakes they make - and this itself is part of the learning process. We all learn well from mistakes unless we are made to feel they are in some way "bad" and Montessori children are not scolded if they make a mistake, they are given sympathy and shown kindly how to put it right.

Working this way children develop amazing powers of concentration, because they enjoy what they are doing, rather like a baby playing at the beach who can work on for ages, digging and pouring, undisturbed. Maria Montessori discovered one fact that educators now take for granted, that what is learned earliest is learned best, so we aim to give sound foundations for as much later learning as we can. If a child really understands what you do when you multiply, when he or she meets multiplication later there is a head start.

In the primary class room children from six to twelve years old are the privileged ones whose parents choose to keep them in the Montessori system for the next stage; privileged because all those early foundations so carefully laid can now be utilised with follow-up that is easily understood. Have you ever thought what it might be like having to change schools before you can read easily and so having to learn to read in a different way all over again? The age of six is too often too early to change systems but because the children are now much more mature they are ready to do much more advanced work in conditions of greater formality and this is what is found in the Montessori Primary classroom.

## **The Montessori Curriculum continued**

Choice is still there of course but the range of choice is more academic; maths and language, history and geography, zoology, ecological studies, music, a second language, arts and crafts, physics and chemistry, algebra and geometry - we aim to give sound introductions to all these subjects so none of them hold any fears at secondary level.

While the National Curriculum is not compulsory for us, it is a good guide to what we should be aiming at and while we do not necessarily test the children, their progress is carefully measured so we know what they are achieving not just at the end of each term but from day to day.

By now they are thinking and working more like adults; their learning is a series of discoveries made in collaboration with their teachers, who are most often seen as aiding and abetting learning, not making reluctant workers comply. 'Hooray, I've got it!' is frequently heard in the classroom as someone makes a new discovery about how grammar works or understand the proof of the theorem of Pythagoras. Work is serious business here and children learn that we never interrupt anyone who is concentrating. There is room for fun and games too, of course; weekly swimming lessons, team games, sports and traditional games like hopscotch and skipping are found in Montessori schools as much as elsewhere, with children being encouraged to co-operate as well as to compete.

Most of all, the aim of Montessori schools is to produce happy children with a love of learning and a good attitude towards schools and grown ups, and to give them the opportunity to learn well and thoroughly; so that in later life they can go closer than any of us to reaching their maximum potential.

# **School Policies**

## **Admissions Policy**

The aim of Wharfedale Montessori School is to provide a setting for all children without discrimination where they can live together in harmony.

The school is a setting for twenty-seven children in the Children's House at Strid Cottage, and Twenty at the Cabin. Children are admitted at between two and a half years and three years of age to the Children's House. This starting age is dependent on them being out of nappies. Children transfer to Primary at the Cabin when they are ready, normally between six and seven years of age. They can stay in Primary until the end of the school year which contains their eleventh birthday.

Places will be offered to children in order of priority.

- a. Date of registration.
- b. Siblings.
- c. Gender balance and cultural diversity.

Parents and children are invited to visit by appointment prior to the offer of a place. The individual nature of the Montessori curriculum means children may begin their education at any time during the academic year.

Parents should note your place on the waiting list does not guarantee a place.

## **ESL Policy**

In the Montessori philosophy children in the early years have a special sensitivity for language when they absorb the spoken word effortlessly.

We recognise that every child benefits by the richness of cultural diversity.

All children will have the opportunity to participate in the full range of language activities within the setting which includes listening to stories/songs etc. and sharing experiences.

Some words, letters and symbols and multi-cultural books in the child's own language will be included in the environment, in addition to the English language. Children needing help with ESL will be given extra support, individually and in groups with appropriate learning materials and resources.

## **Policy on Reporting to Parents**

We recognise that the parent/carer is considered the most important person in the child's life. We aim to create a partnership between parent and school; children's progress is recorded and will be shared with parents at parents evenings on an annual basis. Their records will be made accessible to all parents upon request. All parents are encouraged to bring any matters of

concern to the attention of staff. Written reports on child's overall progress will be made available to parents in the final term.

## **Staff Policy**

We undertake to employ appropriately qualified staff in accordance with the ratios required under the Children Act. All staff are advanced CRB checked.

## **Health and Safety Policy**

We will endeavour to comply with the requirements of the Environmental Health and Safety Executive and Social Services of the Borough applicable to the staff and children at the school.

## **Complaints Policy**

It is the policy to handle parents' complaints in line with the following procedure. All parents may at any time ask for an appointment with their child's class teacher, to attempt to resolve the problem, or if this is inappropriate they may make an appointment with the head or principal to discuss the situation with her.

If parents/carers feel that they have not gained a satisfactory result from such discussions we ask for a formal written complaint letter to be sent to the school. We will then set up a three person panel, two of whom will be senior management/teaching staff e.g. Principal and Head Teacher from the school, plus one panel member who is independent of any involvement with the school either as an employee or governor. The person who would act for our school should this be required is Benedict Heyes, Agent for the Duke and Duchess of Devonshire, on whose estate we are tenants. Complainants will be asked by letter to attend a panel meeting and may bring a friend or relative with them if they wish. A written record of these meetings will be kept and will be made available to all parties concerned with the complaint investigation.

Decision reached at this panel meeting will be final.

A timescale of four weeks will be allowed for this process.

**There have been no formal complaints to the school either in 2008/09 or in the preceding years.**

## **Equal Opportunities Policy**

We operate an equal opportunities policy. We welcome into our School children and staff of both genders, and of all races, creeds and backgrounds with medical disorders and disabilities, providing we are able to meet their needs. A multicultural curriculum is offered to all the children and the specific needs of each individual child are assessed and considered.

**Parents may ask to view our full range of in depth policies including the complaints policy at any time**

## **Discipline Policy Procedures**

### **Discipline Policy (full policy and procedures are given to parents on registration)**

It is our policy never to resort to any form of corporal punishment and to protect all children in our care.

We give positive encouragement to engage in alternative activities and to talk with the child about appropriate behaviour. (We make the child aware of how his/her actions affect others.) We promote respect and consideration for others.

Courtesy is part of the curriculum at Wharfedale Montessori School. Children are encouraged to develop social skills in their interactions with other pupils and adults. This process is greatly enhanced by being continued in a similar manner by parents. The Principal reserves the right to require parents to withdraw their children in rare cases of persistent serious unacceptable behaviour.

Bad behaviour exhibits itself in many ways in young children, the common factor being a need for the child behaving badly to seek attention either consciously or unconsciously. Children who behave badly persistently tend always to be needy children. Bad behaviour falls into various categories examples of which are as follows.

#### **Aggression (physical)**

e.g:- pushing and shoving of the children biting and pinching or pulling hair etc.

#### **Aggression (verbal)**

e.g:- name calling, shouting and screaming at others and generally saying unkind or scary things.

#### **Disruption**

Continuous disruption of the class by interruption of work, snatching things from other being excessively noisy etc.

For all forms of misbehaviour we would take into account all possible elements of the situation.

e.g.:- was there provocation?

was the child who has misbehaved poorly or upset due to such things as a house move, a new baby, problems at home etc.

## **Discipline Policy Procedures continued**

Our actions for behavioural management are:-

Comfort and talk to all children concerned in incident both instigators and recipients of disruption whatever it may be. Work towards solution by discussion of the inappropriate nature of such behaviour and its effects on both parties feelings and ability to get on with good things and be happy together. For many situations this is all that is needed to set things to rights.

For a more persistently disruptive child we find something different and especially interesting for the child to do at a table on his/her own so that positive constructive activities of an interesting and special nature, help to calm and focus the child, who will be feeling bad about his/her behaviour. This special work alone is not in a separate place or a "naughty corner" for the child is still within the normal class group doing something interesting by his/her self until ready and able to join in with the other children in the usual way. The child is told clearly that he/she may come back and work with the rest of the group as soon as he/she feels able to obey the simple rules of courtesy and consideration of others, not hurting anyone and not interrupting anyone's work or disrupting by being noisy or destructive. We discuss with parents any actions we have taken due to the behaviour of their child and keep detailed written observations of behaviour on a day by day basis so that we can work together towards a solution.

If behaviour continues to be unacceptable we may need to seek specialist advice and would notify parents of our desire to bring in a professional external assessor to advise us on possible ways forward. I must stress here that this would be with parent consent after full discussion of possible causes as listed above.

If a child's behaviour does not improve despite all our efforts and where parents will not comply with our request to seek further specialist advice and assessment we may have to ask the parents to remove the child from the school as is clearly stated in our prospectus.

Happily this is an extremely rare situation within any school and would only ever be a last resort.

## **S.E.N. Policy Procedures**

### **S.E.N. co-ordinator Mrs Jane Lord (Principal)**

The School has a policy of integrating special needs children within the class groups, throughout the School, providing we can meet their specific needs. In some cases of Need an NTA will be required for the child in order for proper educational balance throughout the group to be maintained.

Each special educational needs child whose parents approach us for a place will undergo an individual assessment within our School setting, to ascertain whether or not the setting is appropriate for the child.

We admit special needs children on a ratio of one SEN child to twelve children without SEN or other requirements. In order to provide the quality of education, attention for the individual child, and balance within our class groups, it is essential that this ratio is maintained.

### **Identifying children with SEN within the school**

**Definition of an SEN child is** that the child has significantly greater difficulty in learning than other children of the same age or has a disability which prevents or hinders the child from using the educational facilities of the kind provided for children of the same age.

Due to the nature of the Montessori approach to education, and its unique emphasis on observation and recording the individual child's developmental progress on a daily basis any special need in the small child will be picked up early thus giving us a head start in gaining the advice and services that may be needed. Should we suspect that child in our care has any form of special need we would first discuss our anxieties with the parent on a general level before calling in outside professional help in reaching a decision over how best to go forward. Relevant professionals such as Speech Therapists, Educational Psychologists, Autism or Dyspraxia Specialists etc. can all be called in to help us decide on a child's needs with full liaison between school and parents.

Any SEN child within the school will have an individual educational plan (IEP) for any extra assistance and to provide regular new goals or targets to reach.

### **Process of assessment of need** always in liaison with parents

The School follows the Department For Education (DFES) statutory assessment process and guidelines, Early Years Action and Early Years Action Plus, also School Action and School Action Plus

- Stage 1 Information gathering through discussion with parents, initial identification and registration of child's ESN, and increased differentiation in the ordinary classroom.
- Stage 2 Seeking further advice and/or the creation of an individual education plan.
- Stage 3 School/nursery will call on outside specialist help.
- Stage 4 Statutory assessment.
- Stage 5 Statementing.

Statementing proceeds when LEA is satisfied that the child's needs are significant and/or complex; have not been met by measures taken by the School; or may call for resources which cannot reasonably be provided within the budget of the School.



**Parents have a legal right to examine any and all of the schools policy documents. Not all of them are shown in full in this prospectus but we hold all policies in a file for parents to access. please retain your prospectus as a useful reminder for information purposes.**