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Curriculum and assessment policy – working document Autumn 2025

“The goal of early childhood education should be to activate **the child's own natural desire to learn**.”

Maria Montessori

Our Curriculum

For most of the time our children are engaged in exploration and play-based learning which is well resourced and well supported.

Our Nursery is a Montessori nursery and as such the majority of our curriculum is based on the Montessori curriculum.

Montessori is a method of education that is based on self-directed activity, hands-on learning and collaborative play. In Montessori classrooms children make creative choices in their learning, while the classroom and the highly trained teacher offer age-appropriate activities to guide the process. Children work in groups and individually to discover and explore knowledge of the world and to develop their maximum potential.

Montessori classrooms are beautifully crafted environments designed to meet the needs of children in a specific age range. Dr. Maria Montessori discovered that experiential learning in this type of classroom led to a deeper understanding of language, mathematics, science, music, social interactions and much more.

Every material in a Montessori classroom supports an aspect of child development, creating a match between the child’s natural interests and the available activities. Children can learn through their own experience and at their own pace. They can respond at any moment to the natural curiosities that exist in all humans and build a solid foundation for life-long learning.

The Classroom is organised into the following areas of learning

**Practical life**

Practical Life activities are the activities of everyday life and they are involved in all aspects of life. The child observes these activities in the environment and gains knowledge through the real experience of how to accomplish life skills in a purposeful way.

Practical life activities are typically introduced to the child first. The tasks are simple, precise and involve activities that the child has already seen in his home and subsequently wants to mimic.

Practical life activities prepare a child to be productive. The work is holistic and therefore develops the whole child by honing fine motor skills , grace of movement, self-regulation, concentration, to develop good manners, respect for people and materials, self-sufficiency, problem solving, confidence, independence and self-esteem.

Activities within the practical life area indirectly prepare the child for reading and writing. Through these activities the child hones hand-eye coordination and muscle control and executes the tasks from left to right and top to bottom.

Materials used in the practical life area are functioning, breakable and resemble materials we’d see and use in daily life. Montessori did not outline a specific set of Practical life materials but instead created categories that included what she observed and believed to be the most relevant activities to a child’s life and development (this therefore be changed depending on cultural or geographical environment )

Basic procedures such as pouring, spooning, tweezing, basting, opening and closing, folding napkins

Care of self such as: dressing (buttoning, tying, snapping, zipping) hand washing, putting on a coat, sewing, polishing and food preparation.

Care of the environment such as: wiping tables, washing up, watering plants, dusting, washing windows, care of animals (snails, ducklings, caterpillers)

Grace and courtesy such as: following ground rules (walking inside, putting work away etc) demonstrating good manners - hello and goodbye, sitting, helping our friends.

Sensorial

The sensorial area in a Montessori classroom focuses on lessons and activities that help develop the five senses: seeing, hearing, touching, tasting, and smelling. The lessons and activities provided in the sensorial area of the classroom help children clarify, classify, and understand the world around them.

Children learn through experiences, and by engaging in Montessori Sensorial activities, children are able to differentiate between sizes and order through visual discrimination. Visual discrimination in Montessori Sensorial includes activities such as The pink tower, the long rods, the broad stair and the knobbed and knobless cylinders. Through colour awareness, colour box 1,2 and 3, shape awareness such as geometric solids or geometric presentation tray.

Tactile in Montessori is all about touch. Children are encouraged to touch different textures and, by using their sense of touch, heighten their perception and understanding of the world around them. Montessori materials which are available for the children include thermic tablets, baric tablets or touch boards. Children might touch things made of silk, sandpaper, or cotton. Other times, children may be asked to match items made of the same material, while blindfolded. In this way, children must solely rely on their sense of touch in Montessori tactile to complete the task. In doing so, children feel a sense of accomplishment and self-worth. It has been shown that incorporating activities using touch in children develops the child’s kinesthetic learning and stimulates improved ability to understand. As Maria Montessori said - “The hands are the instruments of the mind”.

Our Auditory sense is developed in our Montessori classroom using activities such as the sound cylinders, the silence game and the Montessori bells. These among many more activities help to heighten our children’s sense of sound perception and differentiating one sound from another.

Our taste or smell or Olfactory is used in a Montessori class to develop children’s sense of smell and help them differentiate different types of smells. The Smelling Bottles activity is great to teach children about the different smells in their environment. Growing herbs and flowers help the children to distinguish between smells and a good conversation starter for smells that they like and dislike.

Taste or Gustatory is used in a Montessori classroom to help children differentiate different tastes, we often use the tasting bottle to help the children to distinguish between sour, salty, sweet and bitter and which part of the tongue is used for each one. This can also be done using the Practical Life activities for grating and slicing up different fruits and vegetables, then tasting them to distinguish the different tastes.

By working with these different Montessori Sensorial materials and many more, children’s senses are developed and heightened.

**Mathematics**

Montessori believed that a child’s mind is mathematical and based on the order of perceptual awareness found in the development of the senses (linking to the sensorial area of the classroom)  The acquisition of mathematical principles is seen as developing logically from concrete to abstract, and from simple to complex. Mathematics in our classroom provides the children with opportunities to develop and improve their skills in understanding, using numbers, calculating simple addition and subtraction and to describe shape, size and measures.

The classroom is full of mathematics and is in every area– let alone our ready prepared shelves full of maths activities. We prepare the children indirectly for the use of number and mathematical language when discussing how many children are here today, how many boys, how many girls, how many children are outsode? which is the larger piece of fruit etc when in the practical life area we estimate how much water to pour for example, which is bigger, smaller, wider, thinner, taller, shorter.

We want to give the children a real concrete understanding of number so that it prepares them for later maths at school and our materials such as the spindle box and the cards are counters help to give the children just that along with the number rods and cards which teach the concrete along with the abstract number. With this firm foundation of number we are free to introduce the short bead stair and simple addition/ subtraction with ease when the appropriate time comes for the individual child.

**Literacy**

Montessori recognised the child’s need for a language-rich environment more than a hundred years ago. She advocated babies’ exposure to the spoken word used in the context of everyday life. She recognised adults’ role in promoting rich vocabulary and grammatically correct use of language.

To give the children the confidence to express their wants and needs within the setting to both teachers and peers alike is very important to us, we actively encourage small language groups which help with sound and language acquisition and help the children to gain confidence in expressing themselves verbally within a small group scenario.

Montessori is a very language rich environment where we actively encourage conversation between teachers and children and children with children. We set aside time during our day to have 1:1 discussions with the children, learn about their likes and dislikes, their home environment, activities they like to do and much more. During lunch we sit with the children and again offer topics or join in with their discussions and encouraging questions. During circle time we sing songs, discuss the sound of the week and share experiences during circle time. As the children become more confident they become excited to share their experiences with their peers.

We love to read at Montessori and always have a large array of book for the children. You often will find children exploring the book corner independently or with their friends – quietly reading or in a role play scenario. We read to the children every day individually and as a group.

The children become familiar very quickly with the shape and sound of letters at Montessori – its starts by selecting their name (initially with help) for their peg and drawer each morning and posting their name when they’ve had snack , they quickly become familiar with the shape of their name and can recognise it out of another 30. This along with our weekly soundbox where we explore a letter each week (the children are encouraged to bring in something from home which begins with the sound so they can share with their friends in circle time – not only providing great links from home to school but also developing their confidence to talk to the group) sounds and letters very soon become second nature to the children and are something that they are often keen to explore.

When we explore letters in more detail we introduce the sandpaper letters where we use our sense of touch, we trace the letters and feel the shape of the letters introducing a couple at a time using a 3 period lesson.

Later the children are introduced to the ‘pink series’ which involves blending 3 letter phonic words through a variety of fun activities and then beyond.

**Knowledge and understanding of the world**

Our knowledge and understanding of the world shelves are brimming with activities and experiments from continent boxes to magnetic experiments to hatching ducklings and even our resident African land snails!

We believe in guiding the children to make sense of their physical world and their community. Community is a very important part of Montessori and we are keen to explore our local village, meeting parents who are doctors/nurses/policemen etc during circletime and visiting the local produce market next door on a Friday.

We enjoy celebrating British and non British festivals including the recent jubilee celebrations, harvest festival, Diwali ,valentines day, Christmas, Easter to name but a few.

During the Summer term the children will have the opportunity to watch the whole process from incubation to duckling. They will learn how to handle, bathe and feed them which will be an invaluable experience. There is a vast amount of research to suggest that children who are able to interact regularly with nature and animals have significantly higher emotional well-being, sense of self, empathy and respect for others. At Montessori we promote social, emotional, spiritual and healthy development through experiences in nature.

**Creativity**

The children greatly enjoy the art area and all that it has to offer from colour mixing their secondary colours, to experimenting with different media such as chalk, oil paints, water colours, crayons, pencils clay and much much more. This is a great area for the children to express themselves without limitations, mixing colours with media and creating their very own masterpiece.

When using our bodies for yoga or music and dance the children express themselves while honing their gross motor and core.

**Outdoor learning environment**

Although small our external environment is brimming with activity from growing vegetables, to using the digger, to making potions in the mud kitchen to walking the plank on the Montessori pirate ship! The children have lots of learning opportunities which incorporate the internal classroom too!

Each of the areas have well organised and child centred activities graded from simple to complex. The children will independently access materials or will be guided and introduced to an activity by a teacher.

**How will it benefit the children**

The aim is to maximise the potential of every child by treating them as active learners that need choice and independence. Montessori education teaches children how to learn instead of what to learn.

At Nursery we believe that children are entitled to high quality learning and teaching, we aim to equip them with the skills, knowledge and understanding they need in the moment and for the future. The end result is a life-long love of learning.

We believe that children learn best when they feel happy safe and secure, this is a priority for us at Montessori. From the moment they arrive we aim to forge good relationships with not only themselves but their family.

Teachers provide an essential role in the Montessori environment not only are they there to guide and connect the child’s potential to their environment they are also there to prepare the environment in which the children will learn. The prepared environment is what sets the stage for the child’s learning. An environment that allows freedom within limits must be carefully planned and executed. Elements include: child sized furniture, high quality natural materials, highly organised, natural light and most importantly a warm, welcoming and nurturing environment for the child. The shelves and activities are thoughtfully designed and prepared by the teacher. There is only ever one of each material on the shelves which promotes caring and sharing of the materials, to ultimately teach the child to respect materials and each other.

**Curriculum Overview in a table format**

All aspects of our curriculum require practitioners to be flexible and take account of the individual child, their experiences and interests

The regular cycle of learning – all areas of our Montessori curriculum have a progression, working from the simple to complex with support and guidance from our practitioners, focusing on their interests and helping them to deepen their knowledge.

We believe that not only do we need to teach and support learning in the classroom but to extend this to external activities and to give the children the opportunity to gain new skills and to explore their wider environment, thus developing confidence in the world around them.

The Children gain so much from our knowledge and understanding of the world area, they are introduced to nature, life cycles and the process of caring and nurturing plants and animals in a secure environment.

In order for our environment to work beautifully parental involvement is crucial. We learn so much about each child from their parents, not only the ‘all about me form’ but via daily drop off/collections. Parental support and a high-quality home learning environment make a huge difference

We have designed our curriculum with the particular interests, strengths and needs of the children of Bishops Waltham Montessori in mind. Our goals are ambitious, they provide an overview of many of the different things we would like the children to know and skills to gain. All of our aspirations are adaptable to each child, we offer support to those who made need more. We ensure that each and every child makes great progress through these. We do recognise that not every child will make the same progress either through our aspirations or our Montessori curriculum – every child is different and will acquire skills and knowledge at different times. Our practitioners are very skilled in child development and will assess each child and give extra support if needed. For example one of our aspirations is for our children to make bread, for some children with more complex needs, managing to tolerate the touch of flour and water and mix together to make playdough will represent strong progress. All children access the same curriculum.

**Our aspirations are**

1. For the child to settle and become a happy and confident learner
2. To follow a recipe to make bread
3. To write the letters of your name

**The Planning and assessment**

The Montessori classroom is geared around developing children’s independence and confidence and as such during the first term we will focus and making your children happy and secure within the environment. From this great learning can then begin. We will focus many of our activities around communication and the ground rules of the classroom which are helping the children to become independent and safe while doing so – such as not running, how to carry a chair safely, getting their own snack – sitting at the snack table with their friends and washing up after they have finished. Helping lay the table for lunch, collecting and returning activities to the shelf ready for the next person to use. To name but a few!

Key people will spend time getting to know their children and their families, building a bond and ultimately developing a trusting relationship which will help the children settle into Montessori.

After your child has been at Montessori for 1 month your child’s key worker will arrange a chat, either in person or if preferred a telephone conversation. This will allow your child’s keyworker and you to discuss how your child is settling into Montessori and if applicable a chance for both parents and practitioners to raise any concerns or barriers within this process.

**Children with special educational needs and disabilities**

For children with SEND, focus needs to be aimed at what the child can do and what barriers for learning there may be. We believe that all children should have access to the curriculum and this may require extra support from both practitioners and external agencies but it means that children are not segregated from their peers and have access to the wider curriculum while keeping them safe and developing their skills and knowledge.

**Assessment**

When children start at Montessori we asks parents to fill out an ‘all about me’ which gives us an idea of your child’s likes, needs, family a brief overview so we have a starting block when engaging with your child for the first time.

At Montessori we also have a settling in sheet which gives us an idea of communication, numbers, letters, songs etc which we will slowly fill in over the first month they are with us, so again we have a starting block – this settling in sheet is done every year in September for each child. We also will communicate with you via tapestry, an account will be set up for each child and only you will have access to this. We use tapestry to show you what your child has learnt or is particularly enjoying or an activity which they have really enjoyed. A report is written on Tapestry in December and July and face to face parent meetings are every term – or whenever you would like one.

**Our 3 Aspirations in detail**

**To settle in and become a confident learner**

1. Children make a strong relationship with their keyworker/preferred adult, they separate from their parent with increasing confidence and become involved in their play/work. They use their keyworker/preferred adult as support or as a secure base when needed throughout the session.

Some children will need extra support and help and this will be given, we can arrange parent meetings to discuss the transition and ways forward. As each child grows in confidence within themselves and the environment their play develops their relationships with teachers and peers deepen and grow. They start to play alongside/collaboratively and their pretend play will develop.

As a practitioner we will spend as much time supporting your child as they require, helping them to manage their emotions with support. When the children have reached the end of this milestone they will be able to spend a morning at Montessori managing their own emotions – with support if needed.

1. Children are aware of the ground rules of the classroom and engage in activities independently, completing the cycle of activity when finished with their activities. They take part in pretend play, communicate with friends and negotiate.

As the children’s confidence and knowledge of the classroom grows as does their ability to challenge themselves or be challenged with more difficult activities.

The children will be supported throughout this milestone with positive reassurance and lots of fun activities to support this stage of development. When this milestone is achieved we would like each child to complete the cycle of activity independently and to play with another child/children for 5 minutes while involved in roleplay.

1. Children persevere with difficulties, show determination to overcome these and display pleasure and pride in their achievements. This may be through discussion with peers, teachers or observation

As the children become more independent and confident they have more confidence to take risks and take part in more challenging activities. They discuss their struggles with peers/teachers and are starting to reflect on their learning.

The children will be supported throughout this milestone and guided to more challenging activities and gain a deeper understanding. Discussion between peers and teachers are encouraged.

1. The final milestone is to reflect on their learning, they comment on thinking and the ways they go about learning. They think about and discuss what helps them to persevere through difficulties and what helps when they find something hard.

**Follow a recipe to make a bread roll**

1. With adult support the children mix different materials together, explore texture and utensils. Make simple playdough or mix mud and water in the mud kitchen

As the children reach this milestone they will become more precise in using scoops, carefully counting them out. They will be exposed to lots of different materials – different sized measuring scoops, buckets, measuring cylinders, rolling pins. The children will be confident in using knives while buttering toast or cutting bananas etc.

The children will be supported through this milestone and will be able to mix two items together using tools.

1. The children will be in a small group and follow the steps to making a fruit salad with specific ingredients with a teacher. New tools are introduced and skills mastered such as knife, grater, melon scoop.

As the children reach this milestone they will become confident and safe users of utensils such as knives, they will be using their counting skills, hygiene skills will be mastered ie washing hands and they will understand the fundamentals of healthy eating.

The children will be supported though this milestone and will be able to follow a recipe using cards and discuss the importance of healthy eating.

1. In a small group the children will learn to make simple biscuits, follow the steps in making them with support from an adult. The adult will drawer the attention to the recipe card and with adult support the children use measures , cups, teaspoons etc to mix form a dough and knead. With support they roll out the dough and use cutters. A timer is put on and when finished we discuss the process.

As the children reach this milestone they are becoming more used to cooking and the adult can slowly reduce their input, children are carefully mixing the dough.

The children are able to follow a simple steps on a recipe card with support.

1. In a small group children follow the recipe steps to making a bread roll with an adult. They independently fill the measures and they can recognise the numbers on the recipe card. They can accurately count the right amount of spoonfuls etc into the recipe.

As the children become more independent there is minimal adult support, this can be seen throughout the classroom for example not only mixing secondary colours but shade of them.

The children can accurately measure the ingredients , the final milestone being that they do the above independently and place on a baking tray ready for the oven.

**Write the letters of your name**

1. Children are introduced to the practical life area of the classroom which not only hones the muscles used for early mark making and writing they develop the independent skills that we encourage through our classroom. The children will be increasingly confident in choosing and engaging in activities such as pouring and transferring using spoons as well as throwing and catching balls, pushing wheelbarrows etc in the external environment.

As children build and develop their fine/gross motor they will also engage in activities for longer periods of time. They can grasp concepts easier and can focus on a given activity aware of the process.

As the children reach this milestone they will be able to coordinate the movements of both hands

1. Children make marks using paints, pens, chalk, dough, clay. They are encouraged to explore more complex practical life activities such as use of scissors and cutting strips and are gaining more control over their fine motor movements. The children will be introduced to the sandpaper letters, tracing over the letters using their fingers and are introduced to the sound of each letter and to the sound box and letter of the week. The children will be developing their gross motor with wooden climbing frames, balance boards, yoga and dance session.

The children are increasingly aware of the shapes of letters and the sound they make - The children will be aware of their name shape and can select it for their peg and drawer. As children become more confident with their mark making they will start to give meanings to the marks such as mummy, duck etc.

As the children reach this milestone they will select their own name from their peg, and then with support select the correct letters in the sandpaper letters and make a rubbing of their name.

1. As the children’s fine motor develops and the control over it becomes more refined we introduce still life painting, self portraits, the marks they make become more purposeful and confident. When making a rubbing of their name they will like to write over the top free hand and make tracings of their own name. They are familiar with the language of around, up down and can drawer these independently and with more control and a good pencil grip

The children become more familiar with the sound of their name and the letters and sounds which make up their name and may start to write their name independently.

As the children reach this milestone they will copy lines circles zigzags and trace them too. Their practical life skills are developing well, pouring into 2 marked containers with precision, transferring accurately with a pipette, threading small beads and weaving.

The final milestone will be when the children can hold their pencil with a comfortable grip and write the letters of their name clearly and independently.

These aspirations work alongside our Montessori Curriculum and are something which we feel based on our children that we would like them to achieve before they start school. These however are changeable depending on our children’s needs, we may indeed add an aspiration to our curriculum plan though the year – this will of course be shared with you.