



**Montessori By The Sea  
Evaluation Report**

**February 2010**

**Lead Evaluator: Pachent Smythe**



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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## Introduction

The aim of the Education Standards and Assessment Unit (ESAU) is to contribute to the continuous improvement of education in the Cayman Islands, through rigorous independent evaluations and by providing high quality advice and research.

Each school receives an external evaluation approximately every four years and, six months after an evaluation, a progress check against their action plan. The evaluation identifies the school's strengths and the areas that need to be improved. External evaluations are guided by the criteria in the ESAU *Handbook for the Evaluation of Educational Provision*.

External evaluations provide schools, parents and the community, the Department of Education Services and the Ministry of Education, Training and Employment with an external and impartial evaluation of the quality of a school's work and its impact on students' learning and the standards they achieve. Through the publication of reports, external evaluations contribute to accountability, transparency and openness within the education system.

The Education Standards and Assessment Unit hopes that this evaluation will contribute in a positive way as Montessori By The Sea continues to raise standards of achievement.



**Director**  
Education Standards and Assessment Unit

## Information about the school and the evaluation team

### School contact information

Type of school:	Private
Age range of students:	21 months to 13 years old
Gender of students:	Mixed
Number on roll:	150
School address:	277 Prospect Point Rd, P.O. Box 11747, Grand Cayman, KY1-1009, Cayman Islands
Telephone number:	345 947 0684
Fax number:	345 947 0794
Email address:	<a href="mailto:dct_mbts@candw.ky">dct_mbts@candw.ky</a> or <a href="mailto:kmj_mbts@candw.ky">kmj_mbts@candw.ky</a>
Names of Principals:	Deborah Thompson / Kourtnei Jackson

### Information about the school

Montessori By The Sea is a private international school that provides an education for students ages 21 months to 13 years. The school is located on Prospect Point Road, about five miles from George Town. The school currently operates on two sites. The main site houses the administration building, classrooms from Toddlers to Lower Elementary, specialty subjects, such as music and Information Communication Technology (ICT), a hard court for physical education (PE), and is where most of the school's activities take place. The second site, directly across the road, houses Upper Elementary and the newly formed Grade 7.

The school is a non-traditional institution, which follows the Montessori philosophy. This method of education promotes an extremely practical approach to learning. Each classroom is furnished with child-sized tables and chairs and is divided into sections - Practical Life, Sensorial, Cultural, Science, Language and Mathematics. The way the classroom is arranged and the preparation by teachers to extend students' experiences is referred to as the "prepared environment." All material is placed on low, open shelves and can easily be accessed by students. A wide variety of practical and interesting activities encourages students to explore, create, solve problems and develop their fine and gross motor skills. Teachers are very skilled in applying a suitable balance between intervention and guidance.

Students are placed in multi-age classrooms, allowing flexibility in learning specific skills over a three-year cycle of development. Subjects, except in Grade 7, are not timetabled as would be seen in traditional schools; the curriculum is highly integrated. In the morning, students have a block of uninterrupted work time of about three hours to allow in-depth exploration and engagement in many varied activities, all of which are carefully planned to enhance students' learning at the appropriate level. They work individually, in small groups with others of their own age or mixed ages.

The Montessori Method allows for all learning styles. Teachers introduce the materials to the students and then provide individual or small group support in helping them to complete their work.

The class groupings at Montessori By The Sea are:

- 1) Toddlers ( 21 months to three years) – one class
- 2) Casa ( three to six years) – two classes
- 3) Lower Elementary (6 to 9 years) – two classes
- 4) Upper Elementary (9-12 years) one class
- 5) Grade 7 ( 12-13 years) one class

At the time of the evaluation, there were 150 students on roll – 72 boys and 78 girls. Six students have been identified as having some form of special educational needs. The school's population, both students and staff, represents a diverse range of ethnic backgrounds and nationalities.

## The evaluation

This evaluation of Montessori By The Sea took place from 23<sup>rd</sup> to the 26<sup>th</sup> February, 2010, and involved a team of three evaluators. All members of the team are from the Education Standards and Assessment Unit (ESAU).

**Lead:** Pachent Smythe  
**Team:** Mary Bowerman  
Favourita Blanchard

The evaluation covered all areas of the Evaluation Handbook that were relevant to the uniqueness of the school. The following aspects of the school's work were looked at:

- Standards achieved and progress made by students in language arts / English and mathematics from Casa to Grade 7
- The effectiveness of teaching and how well students learn
- The quality of students' personal development
- The quality and organization of the curriculum
- How well the school is led and managed
- The quality of the support and guidance offered to students
- The effectiveness of links with parents and the community
- How well the school is preparing students to develop the attributes of the 'Educated Caymanian'
- How well teachers help students to learn and use literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology skills across all of their school work

The evaluation team gathered evidence in the following ways:

- 28 visits were made to classes, and all activities taking place were observed, including music, PE and ICT
- School documents, including: handbooks (Employees, Parents and Students) teachers' planning, curriculum statements and guidelines, teachers' notes and records, principals' records and notes of staff meetings were examined
- The school's website was looked at
- Students' work was examined
- Evaluators observed before school and dismissal activities, lunch times and after-school activities

- Evaluators spoke with students and took their views from the questionnaires into account
- Evaluators listened to students read
- Discussions took place with teachers, other members of staff, the President of the Parents' Guild and administrators
- Comments from parents at the meeting before the evaluation and from the questionnaires (parents and teachers) were also taken into account

Evaluators use the following grading scale to describe aspects of the school's work:

Grade		Description
1	<b>Very good</b>	Good in nearly all respects and exemplary in some significant areas
2	<b>Good</b>	Good in most respects. Weaknesses are minor and not in significant areas
3	<b>Adequate</b>	No significant weaknesses, but no major strengths. Improvement needed
4	<b>Unsatisfactory</b>	Some significant weaknesses (might be only one or two) that have negative impact on learning and standards. Cause for concern

Evaluators also use the following criteria from the 'Profile of the Educated Caymanian' to evaluate how effective the school is in helping students to develop these attributes:

The Educated Caymanian will:

- Be enthusiastic and motivated about learning, and will continue to extend his/her knowledge and skills after leaving school
- Be literate, numerate and adept at using information and communication technology
- Be a good communicator
- Be creative and appreciative of the arts
- Have a positive outlook and a high self-esteem
- Be well-rounded, good at finding solutions to problems, flexible and adaptable to changing circumstances and demands
- Have a strong work ethic and willingness to become an honest, reliable and responsible member of the work force
- Be respectful of God, him/herself, others, including people from different backgrounds
- Be respectful of property and the environment
- Be proud of and knowledgeable about the Caymanian culture, whilst respectful of other cultures and beliefs
- Be a good team player, civic-minded and willing to serve
- Have an awareness of global issues affecting aspects of life in the 21st century

## Executive summary of the report

### How effective is the school overall?

Montessori By The Sea is a very good school. Provision for students' personal development, learning and achievement is very effective. There is a warm, welcoming atmosphere and a positive and caring learning environment throughout the school. Parents are supportive of the school and said they are happy for the many learning experiences that the school offers, and to have their children in such a safe, caring and stimulating environment.

The school effectively promotes character education through a strong focus on their Grace and Courtesy programme, and provides well for students' personal, social, moral, intellectual, cultural and spiritual development.

Standards of achievement for the majority of students are good overall. Students make good, and in some cases very good, progress, which is closely linked to the high quality of teaching and effective use of the Montessori materials. The use of ICT across the curriculum to enhance students' learning and enjoyment is very good. Standards of achievement in Grade 7 are more variable.

Students are valued, respected and challenged. Teachers have high expectations and they use a variety of teaching strategies, skills and resources that encourage purposeful learning. These motivate students and keep them engaged and interested in their lessons. Students have positive attitudes toward their work and their relationships with their teachers and peers are good. They are very well behaved across the school.

Leadership and management are outstanding. The two principals have established a clear, strategic direction for the school, which places students at the centre of development. The school's vision, aims and goals are shared, understood and embraced by most stakeholders. Teachers are caring, hardworking, and committed, and are excellent role models for the students. They work well together to provide effective guidance and support to students in each class. The broad and relevant curriculum supports the school's aim in providing students with 'a legacy of limitless possibilities.'

Since the last inspection in 2005, the school has made some very good improvements. For example, there is now a hard court for games and PE, the overall provision for ICT has been improved and facilities across the road have been acquired to house the older students. The school has addressed all the issues for improvement from the 2005 report. However, assessment and reporting on students' standards of achievement remain areas for improvement. The leaders' record of accomplishment demonstrates clearly the school's good capacity to improve further.

### The strengths of the school

- Exceptional leadership and management that provide clear direction, and a system for monitoring and evaluating the work of the school
- Teachers who are excellent role models and who have high expectations for their students
- The quality of teaching overall and its impact on students' learning
- A learning environment that effectively supports all aspects of students' personal development
- Students who are well prepared to become independent and enthusiastic learners
- A very supportive Parents' Guild

### What needs to be improved

- The overall provision for Grade 7
- Strategies for assessing students' attainment against agreed criteria
- Consistency and clarity in the way teachers record students' progress
- The quality of the presentation of students' work

*The school is expected to modify its existing improvement plan or to prepare a supplementary action plan to address the areas for improvement identified above. The amended plan or supplement should be sent to the Education Standards and Assessment Unit **within 40 working days of hearing the draft report**. The school is required to provide parents with an annual update on the progress that is being made in addressing the areas identified as needing to improve.*



## Commentary on evaluation findings

### How well do students achieve and make progress?

The standards that students achieve and the progress they make are closely linked to the Montessori curriculum and materials and the extent to which these are effectively understood and used by both the teachers and the students. During the evaluation, observations of students at work in each section of the school, as well as samples of their written work, demonstrate that most students in Casa, Lower Elementary and Upper Elementary are achieving standards that are at least in line with what would be expected for their ages, and in many cases, above. Standards of achievement in Grade 7 are more variable, as the curriculum is not always appropriate for this age group.

Teachers know the students well, especially if they have been with those same students throughout the three-year cycle. They know what progress each student is making, particularly in terms of practical skills and aspects of personal development, and they observe and record what students do throughout the day. The amount and type of information recorded varies across the school, but in most cases, there is enough information to guide teachers as to which steps to present next or to prompt students to complete unfinished work, for example. The information, especially in Casa and Lower Elementary, tends to be recorded in anecdotal form, as traditional letter grades or percentages are not used below the middle years.

In some classes, rubrics are used to judge students' level of achievement, and test results indicate the level of understanding of a specific concept. However, students' results are dependent on the quality of the rubric or the test, and this may vary according to the teacher. Report cards, issued each term, comment on students' personal development and work habits and indicate whether their academic work 'exceeds expectations', 'meets expectations', 'is approaching expectations' or 'needs improvement'. Teachers confidently record whether students have covered the content for each stage, but have no agreed criteria by which to judge how well they have done or what actual standard they are achieving. A number of parents indicated that they are not clear whether their child is working at the level expected for his age or making the amount of progress expected. There are no performance data based on specific criteria. The success of the system is gauged almost solely by the accomplishments of the students, their attitudes to their work and their growing maturity and love of learning.

### What is the quality of students' personal development?

Students' personal development is a strength of the school.

The development of personal skills is an integral part of the daily routine of each student. Character education is seen as being equally as important as academic education. Staff are excellent role models and students respond by being polite and cooperative, and behaviour is very good. Students learn to shake hands when they greet someone, and speak respectfully. They develop a strong empathy for their friends and willingly help them with an aspect of a lesson or with a task. An example of this was seen in one of the Casa rooms, when a student accidentally knocked over a display of flags. He was quite distressed until a friend came up to him saying, "Don't worry. I'll help you pick them all up!"

Students are introduced to 'peace education' very early. They learn how to work out their differences with each other as they sit at the 'peace table' and come to an agreement as to how to sort out a problem. At all levels of the school the concepts of grace and courtesy are stressed. These attributes are evident in the positive relationships seen between students and their teachers.

Students at all levels enjoy their work. They are confident and work well with others in a small group situation or on their own. They learn to take on responsibilities. All students have something that they are responsible for and they take great pride in carrying out these jobs. From the earliest years, students are encouraged to be independent, doing things themselves. Many of the practical activities that form a part of daily life help them to develop control of movement as well as learning to look after themselves and their environment. They wipe tables and clear up after themselves when they have completed an activity. Even the youngest ones put the material that they have finished with back where it belongs on the shelf. They learn to wash hands, pour drinks, prepare snacks, tie shoelaces and keep everything tidy, and their growing skills in these areas help to build their confidence and self-esteem.

Students' social development is encouraged by their participation in activities that help others less fortunate. For example, they raised money through a Kids Care project, so that they could help a less fortunate pre-school and raised money for the recent victims of the earthquake in Haiti. The development of social skills is a continuous process as the whole ethos and organization of school encourage respect, tolerance, understanding and an appreciation of the needs of others.

They are introduced to the culture of other countries through many of the tactile activities such as puzzle maps and through collections of interesting artefacts. They delight in researching information about a country of their choice in order to produce a project that they can then share with their friends. Parents contribute to the fun by purchasing various interesting artefacts from places they have visited as a family. Material for older students includes such items as cards with information on "What the World Eats". They can find out what typical families in different parts of the world eat, what they would spend on groceries each week and compare the types of food and the costs. This is an excellent way for students not only to learn geographical facts, discuss nutrition, work out dietary sheets, and use their mathematical knowledge to calculate costs of feeding people in different parts of the world, but also to discuss moral and ethical issues concerning wealth and poverty, for example. Students also learn about the Cayman Islands. They sing the National Anthem and National Song regularly and are taught to show respect for the Cayman flag.

Students' understanding of the importance of a healthy lifestyle can be seen in their enjoyment of the snacks and lunches that they bring from home. The school has strict policies about what foods are acceptable. They eat less 'junk' food and more fruits, vegetables and cheese, for example, and can discuss the importance of this. They routinely put on their hats when they go outside for any length of time. They have access to water whenever they want it and many bring their own water bottles.

### **How effective is the teaching and what impact does it have on students' learning?**

The quality of teaching is good overall and sometimes very good. This is a strength of the school. Teaching was good or very good in 78 per cent of lessons seen during the evaluation, with only 4 per cent being unsatisfactory. It was generally better in Casa and Elementary than in Grade 7. Very good one-to-one support was seen in all classes in all subjects.

Teachers demonstrate good subject knowledge and a secure understanding of the Montessori Method. Lesson time is well organized so that a high proportion of time is spent on students' learning. Teachers' good questioning ensures that students are clear about concepts and make connections in their learning. For example, in a small group mathematics lesson in the elementary section, the teacher asked probing questions such as "What is another way to say 11:45?" "How many minutes before 12 is it?" "How do you know?" These helped to extend and consolidate students' understanding of a quarter to the hour.

Teachers make regular and appropriate use of opportunities to develop students' skills in literacy, numeracy and ICT. For example, in a Grade 7 ICT lesson on the use of Excel, the teacher allowed the students to research fast foods of their choice and to calculate, using a formula, the percentage of fat calories and non-fat calories in each, to determine which foods were healthy or unhealthy. This activity helped students to see that reading and mathematics are both connected to everyday needs. Teachers emphasize learning through discussion and this successfully helps to develop students' listening and speaking skills and extends their vocabulary. Throughout the school, students discuss their work and can explain what they are doing and why.

Teachers have high expectations and students are often motivated by interesting and relevant activities that challenge them. Even very young students demonstrate their developing skills in using computers, Smart Boards and reference books. The learning environment is arranged by subject area, and students move around the room freely and in a sensible manner, selecting materials to use. They are confident, competent and articulate. They work well together, are respectful and are not afraid to correct their work. They speak freely about their research and are very creative. However, the presentation of their written work does not reflect the quality of the content. For example, handwriting is untidy, and sometimes letters are not properly formed. The end product is often neither neat nor attractive.

At times students move from one activity to a totally different one without any immediate feedback on what they have done. Sometimes they are changing to another activity because they have not understood what to do. Although some teachers have worked out a monitoring system within their classes so that they know which students have completed which activity, this does not tell them how well the piece of work was done and students do not have any clear guidance as to what is expected of them.

Resources are easily accessible in all classrooms and are suitable for a range of learning needs. There are enough resource materials for all students in the classes and these are always available to facilitate hands-on learning experiences.

### **What is the quality of the curriculum and how well is it organized?**

The Montessori curriculum from Casa to Upper Elementary is organized as a spiral of integrated studies rather than being compartmentalized into separate subjects. The design of the curriculum is effective in promoting students' personal, creative and intellectual development as well as the attributes of the 'Educated Caymanian'. It provides breadth, balance and variety through the range of concepts taught. 'Specialty' subjects such as music, physical education, information communication technology and French add to the richness of students' experiences. The curriculum for Grade 7 is not as well established, as this is the first year the school has accommodated this grade and it takes a more traditional form. Currently, the school offers extra-curricular activities in music, tutoring, Spanish, football and drama. These, together with activities that students engage in through the wider community, make students' learning, rewarding and enjoyable.

There is an overall curriculum plan for the school that draws on the curricula of other countries and describes in general terms what classes are to cover each term. This, along with the Montessori curriculum, provides clear guidance for teachers and makes it possible for the school to track its work for continuity and progression. The curriculum builds on previous content and skills and so there is little repetition across grade levels and there is consistency in the work of parallel classes.

All students have equal access to the whole curriculum because it is flexible enough to be adapted to suit the learning styles and needs of different abilities. The curriculum is planned so that students with special educational needs (SEN) can develop skills that are relevant to their individual needs, whether these are academic, physical or behavioural. Teachers support these students well and they achieve well above what is expected for their ability. For example, in a lesson in Casa, a student with SEN was able to identify that a classmate had mixed up a word beginning with the 'm' sound with a word beginning with the 'p' sound. He pointed this out and the teacher then clarified the sounds for 'm' and 'p' to ensure students could distinguish between the two.

The school has strengthened its provision for PE and there is now a full time PE teacher. Rugby practice is an added feature to some PE classes and this is conducted away from the school during the school day by a volunteer rugby coach. The school ensures that there is bus service to transport students to and from the rugby pitch. The PE teacher accompanies students for these sessions.

The provision for ICT is now good. There is now a part-time ICT teacher who spends sixteen hours per week at the school. The computer lab is equipped with 17 desktop computers and a Smart Board. There are five desktop computers with internet access in the Grade 7 classroom and six laptops with access to internet in the Upper Elementary classroom. There are also Smart Boards and laptops for students' use in every class. Network printers are available in every classroom. Frequent opportunities are given for students to use these for research and in their regular lesson time. The lab is also equipped with a wireless Smart Response (Senteo) system, allowing students to respond to questions on the Smart Board using handheld 'clickers'.

### **How well is the school led and managed?**

Montessori By The Sea is very well led and managed. Two principals share the responsibility for the running of the school. Leadership and management were strengths at the time of the last inspection in 2005 and they have remained so. There have been impressive improvements to the school since the last inspection, including well-established systems to monitor and evaluate the work of the school, added classroom space for the older students and facilities and resources for improving ICT.

The principals ensure that students are at the centre of the school's development. They provide clear and appropriate direction for the work of the school, and there is an atmosphere of unity and purpose. Job descriptions are clearly written and staff are held accountable for their work with the students. The Handbooks for Parents and Students and the Handbook for Employees contain clearly written policies, and procedures that drive the work of the school.

Effective professional development opportunities ensure that new staff receive the orientation they require and existing staff receive support as needed. The creation of a new school website enables teachers to communicate more effectively with parents. Communication among staff and administrators is good. Each staff computer now runs Google Talk, an instant messaging

programme, which allows communication between administrators and staff and does not disrupt class time. Staff are involved in decision making and planning, and are given opportunities to express their views and discuss and receive feedback on their work performance. Staff have commented that they like working at the school and are well supported.

The principals are very aware of the school's strengths and build effectively on these, particularly the areas that enhance students' personal development. They are also very aware of the school's areas of weakness and have implemented school-wide plans and strategies to address these. For example, new resources for the phonics programme have been provided, support has been put in place for supporting staff in the use of ICT across the curriculum, the provision for PE has been improved and there is now a full time PE teacher. The principals and the programme coordinators for each section of the school monitor the teaching and learning and track students' progress. The school's leaders have recognized that a system is needed for measuring students' standards of achievement, and are pursuing various options. The system for collecting general data is good and this information facilitates the smooth running of the school.

The newly formed Grade 7 demonstrates the forward thinking of the principals. However, the curriculum for this grade is not yet securely established and students are not making the progress of which they are capable.

The strong, focused leadership, combined with a committed and enthusiastic staff enable the school to function effectively and efficiently. Students enjoy coming to school. They feel safe, work hard and achieve well. Improvements since the last inspection have been commendable and the school has the capacity to improve even further.

### **How effective are other aspects of the school's work?**

#### **The support and guidance offered to students and level of care for their welfare**

The support, guidance and care that students receive at Montessori By The Sea are very good.

Throughout the school, teachers keep track of students' progress. Students stay within one class grouping of the school for three years. With at least two teachers in each group, there is a good chance that even if one teacher leaves, there will still be someone who has a good understanding of the needs of that group. The daily monitoring of activities helps teachers to ensure that students complete unfinished work and to ascertain where further individual or small group support may be required. Teachers spend a part of each day working with individual students. They listen to younger students read or give guidance in specific activities that the student has chosen to do. Students' records are available and accessible to all teachers on the school's computer network. 'Red Flag' weeks in November and March of each year provide a useful time when teachers review the progress of all students. Parents are contacted if there are any concerns about their child.

Teachers are sensitive to students' emotional as well as academic needs. For example, if a student needs to be alone for a while, a quiet spot is found where that student can work. There are no trained counsellors on the site, but teachers monitor students' needs and if necessary, help parents to obtain professional help. All teachers are required to take the "Darkness to Light" training that equips them to be proactive in preventing child abuse and to recognize and react responsibly if it should occur.

Good behaviour is promoted through constant encouragement or re-direction. No bickering among students was seen during the evaluation. Rules are kept simple and are displayed on classroom walls. Students are not rewarded or punished, but they receive positive and encouraging comments from teachers. Each situation is dealt with on an individual basis and teachers constantly model appropriate behaviour by speaking softly and respectfully. Students generally respond by doing the same.

All staff are trained in first aid and CPR. Students' minor injuries are dealt with in the office in a sympathetic manner. Playground supervision is very good, and students generally obey safety rules, for example when playing on the playground equipment.

The school stresses the importance of a healthy lifestyle that includes 'exercise, a proper diet and intelligent choices regarding personal health and hygiene...' Policies concerning all these aspects are published in the handbook for parents and students. Parents and students are made aware of the need for a healthy diet and there are strict guidelines as to the types of food that students are allowed to bring for snack time and lunch. The school does not allow soda or candies, for example, and they are a "nut free" school because of the occurrence of severe nut allergies. Special meetings are held to discuss puberty and parent volunteers provide yoga and 'body image' classes. Life skills are effectively promoted throughout the school and this is taught as a discrete subject in Grade 7.

Students' attendance is monitored regularly and recorded electronically. Attendance is better among the older students; younger students tend to have more time off school due to illness.

The school has identified six students as having special educational needs. They have been formally assessed. The individualized nature of the programme allows them to make very good progress. Teachers are knowledgeable about the students' needs and work with them accordingly. Those receiving support from visiting specialists do well and the collaboration between specialists and class teachers is good. Teachers are able to follow up on suggestions. Students for whom English is a second language are all fluent in English and do not require additional support.

## **Links with parents and the community**

The school's partnership with parents and the community is generally good. Parents speak highly of the school and feel that they are kept well informed.

Parents receive clear, helpful and timely information on a regular basis about important activities and developments. They are encouraged to communicate with the school or consult teachers about their children's progress and achievements and they receive timely progress reports. Parents expressed the view that teachers' comments on the reports are often not explicit enough in identifying how they as parents can help their children to improve.

The handbook for parents includes details of the Montessori philosophy, the curriculum, and general policies and procedures, for example, attendance, personal health and safety and homework. The handbook also includes details about how parents can participate in the life of the school. The school makes the parents feel very welcome and encourages them to be involved in their children's learning in many worthwhile ways. For example, parents offer their services to demonstrate special skills like yoga or speak about their jobs or about their culture. They participate in field trips, or come in to help with cooking or to bring artefacts to display for various lessons.

The school has established effective links with the community. Students participate in events such as cancer walks, visits to the Pines Retirement Home and Art at the Governor's. Students are involved in a monthly fund raising event, when they raise funds for different causes. Older students contribute time to the Humane Society where they help to walk dogs.

The local community is very involved in the life of the school. People come in to share their talent with the students and the school has had visits from a counsellor to talk with older students about puberty and the body. Other community workers who have shared with the school are the Police Department, Fire Service, Sanitation Services and the Red Cross Association. Members of the Human Rights Committee have visited to discuss various topics with students.

Students are also entered for sporting events such as swimming and football and they recently celebrated their performance in the national primary schools' football competition. They also participate in the National Children's Festival of the Arts.

## What is the quality of teaching and learning in subjects?

### How effective is the provision for language arts?

Overall, the provision for language arts is good.

From Casa through to Upper Elementary, standards of achievement in all aspects of language arts are generally above what would be expected for students' ages. In Grade 7, although students' speaking and listening skills are well developed, and they are articulate and confident in expressing themselves orally, reading comprehension skills are not as strong, and there is quite a range of proficiency in their writing skills.

The language arts curriculum for each age group is well planned and documented and students are expected to cover all the aspects appropriate to their age. In addition, the Montessori philosophy blends and develops all the strands of language arts in an effortless way through almost all the activities that students are engaged in, not just those connected with 'language arts' per se.

Students' speaking and listening skills are particularly well developed. Through skilful questioning, teachers at all levels encourage students to talk. They learn very early to enjoy listening to the ideas of others and to take turns when contributing to a discussion. The learning environment ensures that students feel confident and secure in expressing their thoughts and ideas and in this way, their vocabulary increases very quickly. Teachers introduce technical vocabulary as appropriate, and as students become familiar with it, they use it naturally in their own conversations.

They often work on activities in pairs or small groups, and this further enhances their speaking and listening skills. Younger students in the classroom listen, respond to what they hear, and quickly progress to the point where they want to know more. Older students, meanwhile, are beginning to process what is going on around them into more abstract thought. Throughout the school, students are articulate and confident in expressing an opinion or asking and answering questions.

Teachers regularly read aloud to younger students, and the desire to read for themselves is encouraged through the provision of a solid foundation of phonics and the motivation to do what the older students are able to do. Their natural curiosity is stimulated through the introduction to a broad range of activities, and for most students, reading skills develop easily. Most are able, at an age appropriate level, to read fluently and with expression. Many are developing good comprehension skills. By the time they are in Upper Elementary and Grade 7, their choice of books is very varied as they read for information as well as for pleasure. Quiet reading time is promoted throughout the school and each day some time is set aside for this.

Students are free to investigate further things that particularly interest them, and this in turn encourages new levels of reading, research and writing. Students in Lower Elementary, for example, take great pride in writing their own 'chapter books' and being able to present these to their classmates. Writing opportunities abound. Students are guided to produce more formal pieces of writing for different purposes and audiences, but they can also pursue their own interests and research and write or electronically produce projects that they can then share. The presentation of written work, however, is not strength of the school. Although students are guided in handwriting practice, very few seem to take pride in the way they present their work, and younger students do not consistently form their letters correctly.



The Montessori materials for language arts are carefully sequenced and presented in a lively and interesting way to students. Once the materials have been introduced by teachers, students use them to progress at their own pace and according to their particular interests. The materials help students to visualize some of the more abstract concepts, so that using specific symbols to represent the different parts of speech, for example, helps students to understand more easily the functions of each of these.

### **Literacy across the curriculum**

The seamless integration of language arts across the curriculum, coupled with the Montessori philosophy of encouraging students to follow their interests, is very effective in developing students' speaking, listening reading and writing skills.

Students have regular opportunities to share and develop ideas in all subjects and especially as they work on activities of their choice. Subject-specific vocabulary, including that used in the 'specialty' subjects such as ICT, PE and music become a part of each student's conversation. They are motivated to read for information and they do this with interest and enthusiasm, producing formal and informal pieces of writing as they record their discoveries in different subjects.

Speaking and listening skills throughout the school are well above expectations for students' ages. Reading and writing, while also being above the level expected in Casa through to Upper Elementary, are not quite as well established in Grade 7.

### **How effective is the provision for mathematics?**

The provision for mathematics from Casa to Upper Elementary is good. The teaching of mathematics moves students from the concrete to the abstract. From a very early age, students use hands-on learning materials that make abstract concepts clear. This helps students to understand and develop a sound foundation in mathematics and even the very young children can work with large numbers. For example, students in Casa can use a stamp board with number tiles to solve problems such as 4,324 minus 2,123 and use their knowledge of place value to work out 4,682 divided by 2 with the use of specially prepared concrete materials.

Teachers' expectations of what students can do are very high, and combined with some good teaching and the effective use of the hands-on materials, result in students in these classes achieving well above what is expected for their ages.

Students from Casa to Upper Elementary make good progress in class and over time. Teachers are well aware of what is taught in classes below and above their age group so there is no overlap or repeating of topics at the same level. They monitor students as they work in order to have a clear picture of those who need extra support. The topics each student has covered are recorded, but even though teachers know what students need to do to improve they do not consistently note this.

Teachers plan regularly and provide many opportunities for students to learn through discovery with the use of Montessori materials. Once the material has been introduced, students work on their own or in small groups with guidance from the teacher. Their effective use of ICT to introduce or consolidate concepts ensures that students are engaged and interested in finding out more. Their good questioning skills help students make connections in their learning. The focus

is on helping students understand concepts rather than just completing activities. Activities are carefully chosen to match the learning objectives. Most students are confident enough to question things and respond well to questions asked by the teachers.

Students have a good grasp of a variety of mathematical concepts. Even the youngest ones are able to identify 'more' and 'less' as they pour liquids or sand from one container to another and use simple equipment to measure. Students in Casa used measuring cups to measure the ingredients they needed for sunflower seed bread that they were making. Students have very positive attitudes to their work and many are self-motivated. They are comfortable using the Montessori materials and many ask for help if needed.

Students build on prior knowledge of concepts taught. For example, a student in Lower Elementary was able to explain how to use the fraction board to solve a word problem she had never encountered before.

Many of the students take responsibility for their learning – they choose what they want to work on. Students of all abilities make good progress in mathematics because of the good one-to-one support they receive from their teachers. They also benefit from peer tutoring as they help each other. For example, an elementary student showed a classmate how to use the small bead frame correctly to add and subtract 4-digit numbers. They did not have to wait until the teacher was free before they could move on. In Upper Elementary, a student who had a good grasp of the properties of triangles was allowed to "teach" this concept to her peers.

The mathematics curriculum for Casa to Upper Elementary is good and includes areas such as geometry, measurement and algebra. There is a teachers' guide that shows at what age certain concepts should be introduced and revisited and these are effectively used by the teachers in their planning.

The curriculum for Grade 7 is not as well established. On paper, the topics to be covered are appropriate for the age group, but the level of work being done within these topics is not always what would be expected of students of this age. All the students are expected to do the same work, but there are some who need to be challenged more and others who need extra support. With much of the work pitched at too high or too low a level, students lack motivation and standards of achievement are barely adequate.

## **Numeracy across the curriculum**

Numeracy across the curriculum is good.

Classrooms are numeracy-rich environments. Students use the materials freely as they consolidate various mathematical concepts in a range of subjects. They are competent and confident with numbers from an early age. Young students count how many classmates are present and insert missing numbers in the calendar for the week. As students research animals in history lessons, they use what they know of place value to read large numbers to identify the weights of the animals, and also to read the population of countries they are studying. In music students discuss time lines as they research periods within which certain types of music were written.

All these opportunities help students to see how mathematics plays an important part in their lives as well as allowing them to use what they have learnt in mathematics to solve problems in other areas.

## Information and communication technology (ICT) across the curriculum

The overall provision for ICT across the curriculum is very good.

The resources for ICT are very good. The ICT programme is well established and exposes students to a range of skills. Students are able to learn proper typing skills and techniques through programmes such as Mavis Beacon Teaches Typing and Paws in Typing Town. Students are comfortable using Microsoft Windows operating systems, while also being introduced to other operating systems such as Linux. There is a computer suite of 17 computers that serves students from Casa through to Grade 7. Classrooms are also equipped with computers and some have Smart Boards. Digital cameras and senteos add another dimension to the range of students' experiences. The resources and the skills learnt in discrete ICT lessons are widely used across all aspects of the curriculum. Students achieve well and gain very helpful skills, knowledge and understanding.

Technology is a regular feature of most lessons and some students commented that ICT is the 'best' subject in the school. Students are very enthusiastic, and are eager to share their skills with adults.

Many students are very comfortable and competent in using ICT. During the week of the evaluation, students from Casa to Grade 7 were seen effectively using the Smart Board and computers to enhance their learning, for research, and to make PowerPoint presentations during lessons. They are responsible in their use of the internet and abide by the rules. Some students use scientific calculators in mathematics lessons. Students have made games, and used animation in presentations for scoring answers. Students spoke about the way they used digital cameras to put together animation films that they shared via the internet, and the games they had created themselves on line via the Scratch website.

Teachers also use technology well in a range of areas, for example, in music, art and PE. One teacher has been piloting a trial of Engrade, a secure online grade book, which allows her to track students' grades on a daily basis and share them online with parents.

## Appendix

### Recommendations

The following are some suggested ways that the school could try to overcome the weaknesses identified in the 'What needs to be improved' section on page 7 of this report.

In order to improve

#### 1. **The overall provision for Grade 7**

- Develop and clearly plan the curriculum so that the work students receive is at an appropriate level
- Ensure that the transition to a traditional way of teaching and learning is more gradually introduced
- Ensure that differentiated work is provided as needed

#### 2. **Strategies for assessing students' attainment against agreed criteria**

- Develop agreed criteria for what the average student should be able to do and understand in each aspect of the work of the class
- Share these criteria with parents and students and ensure that they understand them
- Provide time for teachers to work together to understand how to use the criteria in a consistent way
- Develop a clear method of reporting these outcomes to parents

#### 3. **Consistency and clarity in the way teachers record students' progress**

- Develop a recording system throughout the school that will provide a clear picture of students' progress, including what they need to do to improve

#### 4. **The quality of the presentation of students' work**

- Teach and enforce proper formation of letters
- Provide model pieces of work so that students can see what is expected in terms of neatness and attractiveness
- Provide specific rubrics for the presentation of projects

### **Recommendations for language arts**

- Develop a more appropriate curriculum for Grade 7
- Provide explicit help with strategies for reading comprehension in Grade 7
- Ensure that all students understand how to write for a range of different purposes and get enough practice in this
- Ensure that students receive clear feedback on what they need to do to improve
- Set high expectations for the presentation of written work

### **Recommendations for mathematics**

- Improve the provision for mathematics in Grade 7
- Develop a system to clearly track students' progress from one year to the next within and across class groupings