



Annual Report 2020

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“Here for the children since 1975”

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Introduction

The Children's House Montessori School is a not-for-profit community based entity located in North Ryde, Sydney. Our objectives are to establish, maintain and develop a school based on the philosophy and educational methods of Doctor Maria Montessori along with the curriculum of the NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA).

The school operates one classroom for three to six year olds. One class for three and four year olds and a toddler group that runs three mornings a week. Students who are turning five participate in the kindergarten program that runs five full days a week.

Our Philosophy

We believe children:

- Are unique and valued individuals who develop in different areas at different rates and with different styles.
- Should be encouraged and supported in the pursuit of their learning interests and abilities.
- Develop positive self-esteem by having the opportunity to experience and accept new challenges in a safe and encouraging environment.
- Have an innate capacity for learning and desire to learn.

As teachers our aims are:

- To enhance each child's strength, competencies and self-esteem.
- To facilitate the development of the total child with the integration of the intellectual, emotional, physical, spiritual and social aspects of life.
- To develop the independence and adaptability of the child as we see education as an aid to life and preparation for it.
- To provide a learning environment that is active, experimental, individually paced and self-correcting, independent and unlimited in scope.
- To provide a range of experiences, challenges and beliefs that contribute to their understanding, empathy and acceptance of others without bias, regardless of their ability, gender, culture, family structure or economic status.
- To maintain a safe healthy environment that will enhance our children's autonomy, initiative and self-worth.
- To help children learn to interact effectively, and in doing so to learn to balance their own rights, need and feelings with those of others.
- To acknowledge the worth of the cultural and linguistic diversity that children bring to the environment.
- To encourage families to share their knowledge of their child and to reciprocate by sharing our knowledge of children with parents so that there is mutual growth and understanding in ways that benefit the child.
- To understand and have respect for their dignity and worth as a person.

As a community:

- We encourage families to contribute as volunteers to provide ongoing support to enable our preschool to run effectively and flourish.
- We actively cultivate respectful, supportive relationships among children, teachers, parents and the community.
- We welcome visitors to our school in a friendly courteous manner.
- We are keen to be involved in local events as a means to give back to our local community.

Rationale

This report is required in order to meet the educational and financial reporting obligations of NES. The details provided follow the prescribed list in the Registered and Accredited Individual Non-government Schools (NSW) Manual June 2020, which regulates Kindergarten through to Year 12.

Application

Only a small proportion of our students are affected by the educational and financial reporting obligations. In most instances, it is not possible to isolate information specific to the Kindergarten program. Therefore, information is provided relating to the entire school.

Period of Report

This report covers the 2020 calendar year.

Sydney Montessori Society

The Sydney Montessori Society manages the Children's House Montessori School. Each family with a student at the school is required to be a member of the Society. A Council of Directors administers the Society. The Council is elected by the members of the Society at the Annual General Meeting held in May each year.

The School Council consists of a minimum of six Council Members, four are Society Members and one who is the current Principal.

Current Council Members are:

Jason Zhang	Chair
James McCullough	Vice Chair
Andrew Hansen	Secretary
Shikha Chadha	Treasurer
Shruthi Samudrala	Human Resources
Denise Underwood	Principal

Chairperson's Report

The Sydney Montessori Society, through The Children's House Montessori School (the "School"), continues to provide Montessori education to children aged between three and six years old at its North Ryde premises.

Despite the challenges that a COVID-ridden 2020 presented, the school persevered and managed to operate near full capacity during the year. Enrolments for 2020 was extremely healthy at 90%, with the limited spare capacity due to parents of new 3-year-olds hesitant in enrolling their child due to COVID. The return to a more normal environment in 2021 has the School's attendance at 35 children as we enter Term 2 and projecting no spare availability by Term 4 of 2021. This positions the School extremely favourably heading into 2022 as the School successfully capitalises on the past initiatives which have been successful in attracting new families as well as retain existing ones.

The school currently leases its premises from the City of Ryde and this provides us with some certainty of tenure allowing the committee to plan for the long-term future of the school. The school continues to maintain a good relationship with the City of Ryde, who due to COVID, offered substantial rental relief for 2 quarters in 2020 and 2 quarters 2021 with a 50% discount on the rental fees. Whilst the lease remains on a month-to-month post expiry in 2019, the delay in finalising a new long-term lease has been communicated by the City of Ryde as due to COVID related disruptions and there is no reason not to expect renewal of the lease in the coming months.

Education of the child and maximising involvement by the parents are an important part of the school's approach. Whilst COVID prevented the School from hosting families for Guest Days or allowed parents to attend observation sessions during 2020, the reopening in 2021 has allowed the School to once again welcome parents into the classroom via observations held before the end of Term 1. This provided parents with the opportunity to witness how their children behave, learn and interact in the classroom. Another observation week is planned for Term 2; with a Parent Information night to be held in June to provide an insight into the Montessori Method and help families understand and appreciate the skills and knowledge their children will acquire.

As a parent run school, the support from our parents is critical to our school being able to function effectively. Although the School was unable to host any in-person activities in 2020 due to COVID, we look forward to seeing parents at our social events in 2021, including maintenance days, fundraising efforts (such as Bunnings barbeques) and the various social gatherings.

Fiscally, the School delivered a healthy surplus for 2020 and is on track to deliver another surplus in 2021. The School obtained significant funding support from Federal and State governments and departments in 2020 due to COVID, which the School was delighted in passing onto our parents via substantially reduced school fees. The School's healthy balance sheet provides the opportunity to identify and undertake capital improvement programs for the building and associated amenities, which will provide the children with the most optimal environment to conduct their Montessori education.

Our dedicated staff continues to deliver outstanding education outcomes for all children in a positive and caring manner. Staff morale remains high, turnover low and professional development of our teachers continues to be a high priority for the school council. On behalf of the parent body, I extend the utmost of thanks and appreciation for their efforts.

Jason Zhang
Chairperson

Treasurer's Report

At a consolidated level, the school made a profit of \$112,172 in 2020, which was up from the \$21,201 profit made in the 2019 financial year. Our current priorities (both short and long term) are centered on ensuring strong student enrolments, ensuring staff capacity and development, as well as continued building improvements. The school optional building fund contributions have been generous with donations amounting to \$8340. We will continue to seek these contributions in the future from parents.

In addition to tuition fees and the Department of Education funding, the school's fundraising program is an important additional source of revenue. The 2020 program raised approximately \$4161, with the majority of funds coming from Bunnings BBQ's. The parents organise and manage the fundraising activities and the wider school and local community support these.

Many parents will devote time and energy to this important task again in 2021. Furthermore, many local businesses in the community provide financial and other support to assist our fund raising events.

The marketing and communications strategy continued in 2020, with the aim of raising the school profile and understanding of the school and Montessori education in the broader community has brought in many new enrolments. We look forward to full classes by the middle of term three.



Principal's Report

What an interesting year 2020 was. Our main objective was to continue educating and caring for our children and providing a safe place to be amidst all the comings and goings in the community. I believe we did in fact achieve this. I am pleased to report our school only closed for one week before the April 2020 holidays. This was to give us an extra week to plan, clean and think through the logistics of what was happening. Following the Department of Education's advice, we locked the gate and let only children through it. Parents were very understanding and helped by not staying by the drop off area for too long. Our children slowly adjusted to the new drop off arrangements and only one or two found it difficult to say goodbye to their gate.

Each term, apart from our individual Montessori work, the children have projects to work on. Term one projects are based around countries of the world, famous artists, colours, magnets, and life in the sea. Term two projects were people in the community who help, Australia, weather and climates, mapping, natural and manufactured products and zoo animals. Term three projects were things that grow, continents of the world, and classification of living things. Term four projects were on electricity, soluble and insoluble, water cycle and erosion, solar system, timelines, and volcanoes. . It was so nice to see in photographs what each child was like as a baby and to have their growth documented in this way to the current day. Thank you to the parents for providing the pictures. The children enjoyed sharing them with their peers and teachers.

It was such a shame that we could not have our parents and families attend our usual guest days, parent information evenings and family fun day. We communicated with our families through many photos of our activities so they felt part of their children's journeys. For new enrolments, we made a video of our classroom and put that on our website. This enabled us to establish enrollments for 2021.

The students gained an understanding of the larger community beyond the walls of the school through excursions to the Sydney Aquarium which we managed to get in just before COVID had established itself, and the Botanic Gardens, which we did towards the end of the year. This year we introduced travelling by minibus to eliminate contact with lots of adults and this worked well. It also provided the children with a different experience. We will continue using the bus for 2021.

I would like to thank the School Council for their support through 2020 and look forward to another eventful year in 2021.

Denise Underwood



Contextual information about the school

Teaching Staff

The teaching staff were consistent and stable in 2020. Both Early Childhood Teachers are accredited with NESAs as proficient and continue to attend professional development activities. Both Teachers have Bachelor of Education (ECE) degrees with one Teacher also holding a Master's degree in Primary Teaching and an MBA. Teaching Assistants have Montessori Diplomas and Children Services Diplomas. The ability of The Children's House to retain qualified and committed staff is a key strength of the school.

Due to COVID restrictions, our Teachers were only able to provide parents with the opportunity to experience the Montessori Method through one information evening. This session gave parents an insight in child development through the three to six age range. Then how our school focused on following the child, allowing the child to develop socially, emotionally and academically to the best of their abilities. Teachers also attended the monthly council meetings, prepared, wrote columns in the newsletters, and regularly updated parents about their children's development.

Teachers observed and interpreted children's experiences, used assessment practices to plan, and present Montessori lessons based upon individual learning styles, strengths and dispositions. Twice a year, they prepared written assessments of the children's progress and undertook parent interviews to discuss them.

Professional Learning:

Teaching staff continued their professional development participating in many online courses through NESAs to maintain their teaching accreditation. Most of the courses through NESAs centered on the delivery of the school curriculum and assessment practices. One educator is studying for the Bachelor of Early Childhood Education. Annual expenditure on professional learning for 2020 was only \$3141; however, we are holding \$750 to spend in 2021 to reimburse a teacher for university courses.

Staff attended fortnightly staff meetings to discuss Pastoral Care, Work Health and Safety, administration necessities, and curriculum and policy development.

Workforce Composition:

The schools' workforce is composed of six staff with two teachers, three childcare-trained educators and one administrator. Eighty-three percent are from an English speaking background with seventeen percent from non-English speaking background. One hundred percent of the staff are of the female gender with an average age of 50 years.

Staff have all completed the working with children check upon appointment, and all hold a current first aid certificate. Staff attendance has been excellent due our healthy environment. Long-term staff ensure a great stability with the children and the overall program.

Characteristics of the student body

There are currently 34 children enrolled in the program between three to six years of age with approximately equal number of boys and girls. Most of the families are from the Ryde and surrounding area.

In 2020, five children were eligible to attend our kindergarten class (Early Stage One). Out of the students attending at the kindergarten stage at our School, three are boys and 2 are girls. All students speak English fluently. There are no Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders students currently enrolled at the school.

All children met the curriculum outcomes set by the NESA. Teachers closely monitor student's transition to their next stage of schooling. Opportunities for these children to visit their respective schools were arranged and any lack of readiness was addressed.

Student Attendance Rates

The attendance rate for the school population of kindergarten children for 2020 was 90.75%.

Student non-attendance

The school monitors the daily attendance and absences of students in the school by maintaining a daily register for each class. The School Administrator identifies and records any student absences from classes. The School Principal follows up any unexplained absences in the appropriate manner with the parent/guardian. Where unsatisfactory class attendance is identified the attendance issue and any action taken will be according to the Student Attendance Policy.

Parents are responsible to notify the School of absences due to sickness and also to notify and seek permission prior to extended leaves of absence. Parents are encouraged to show their commitment to the value of education by ensuring their child's regular and ongoing attendance at school.

Post school destinations

Four of the students moved onto local public primary schools. One student moved onto a Montessori Primary School in Balmain.

School policies

Enrolment Policy

Our students commence at the School when they turn three. Prior to commencement parents, observe in the classroom and are given the opportunity to ask questions about the Montessori Method and our curriculum. It is expected once their child has commenced that they proceed from the three and four class to the Kindergarten class in the year they turn five before 1 August.

The school's policy on enrolment acknowledges the rationale and requirements of current legislation. It combines this with the processes of enrolment and responsibility for student welfare established in the school already.

The School admits students of any race, gender, religion, national and ethnic origin in line with Montessori learning and philosophy.

New students to the school start individually allowing opportunity for staff to assist with the transition from home to school.

Student Welfare

The welfare of our students is of paramount importance. The quality of care creates an atmosphere in which our students feel secure, valued and encouraged in their learning, growth and social development. Our existing policies inform and reassure parents that their children are being educated in a safe, caring and healthy environment.

Anti-bias

Behaviour management

Children with special needs

Confidentiality

Fire safety and Education

Multicultural

Work, Health and Safety Duty of Care

Regarding Staff Student Relations

Safe and Supportive Environment

These policies are reviewed regularly and updated when necessary and can be found in our 'Policy Folder'. Policies reviewed in 2020 were:

Excursion Policy

Infectious and Viral Diseases Policy

Sleep and Rest Policy

Transport Policy

We also cover the responsibilities of employees, including our Code of Conduct, in our Staff folder.

Behaviour Management Policy

The aim of a Montessori environment is to help each child develop inner self-discipline. This development is fostered by the ordered organization of the classroom and by the child's freedom to choose and work at an activity without interference. Guidance is given when appropriate.

This approach alleviates many disciplinary problems by helping the student gain skills in self-discipline within a controlled environment. Limits are set for the benefit of the group and each student's individual development. Setting limits helps students to start what is hopefully a lifelong process of feeling secure, orienting themselves in the world, and finding appropriate expression for feelings that are hard to control.

Reporting complaints and resolving grievances

The procedures to follow by both teachers and parents are outlined in the Parent Handbook. A copy of the complaints procedure is displayed on the information noticeboard.

In general, the teacher will endeavor to find a suitable resolution to an issue raised within five working days. If the complaint is of a more serious nature, it may have to be escalated to the next step sooner.

A parent may lodge a complaint or grievance with the Principal if the teacher has not been able to address the situation to a satisfactory conclusion.

If not resolved the parent can take their complaint or grievance to the Vice-Chair who will then discuss it with the Principal and Chairperson.

If the problem has still not been resolved to your satisfaction, following the steps given above, parents can contact:

NSW Department of Communities and Justice
<https://www.dcj.nsw.gov.au>

The Office of the Children's Guardian
<https://www.kidsguardian.nsw.gov.au>

School performance

Initiatives to promote respect and responsibility

Respect and responsibility are the founding stones of the Montessori philosophy and teaching principles. Central to Montessori philosophy is giving the children the freedom for spontaneous activity. The materials are self-correcting and the child can gauge his or her own performance. Children develop independence, responsibility, persistence and confidence in their own abilities.

They use a special set of educational materials, choosing their activity themselves, guided by their teacher, and can engage in that activity until they feel they have completed it. They discover a love of learning. They mentor younger children and explore their world in a cheerful atmosphere of orderliness, calmness and purposeful work.

Parent, student and teacher satisfaction

The Children's House Montessori School is a parent-governed school. The Board consists of five parents who have been parents of the school for between one and five years. As part of the parent body, they report on parent satisfaction or non-satisfaction. To date there have been no issues with dissatisfaction with either, the teaching staff, the curriculum or the environment.

There seems to be a consensus that parents are satisfied with the decisions that the Board are making. Parents have the opportunity to discuss any issues with the Principal at any time.

Teachers meet with parents twice a year at formal interviews to address any concerns they may have about their children and to report on progress. This gives parents the opportunity to give input on the curriculum and its delivery. Many parents say how surprised they are on how much their child has learnt.

The School is very grateful for the long-standing support of the staff. Two staff have been at the school for over 18 years, two for over 11 years, and two for 3 years. This demonstrates a commitment to the school, parents and children and shows their satisfaction re working conditions.

Priority areas for improvement

The Children's House' priority areas for improvement in 2020 were all addressed throughout the year. They included:

- 1: Maintenance of the grounds.
- 2: Making afternoon sessions available to 5.30 pm if required by parents.
- 3: Communication with parents

Priority areas for improvement in 2021 are:

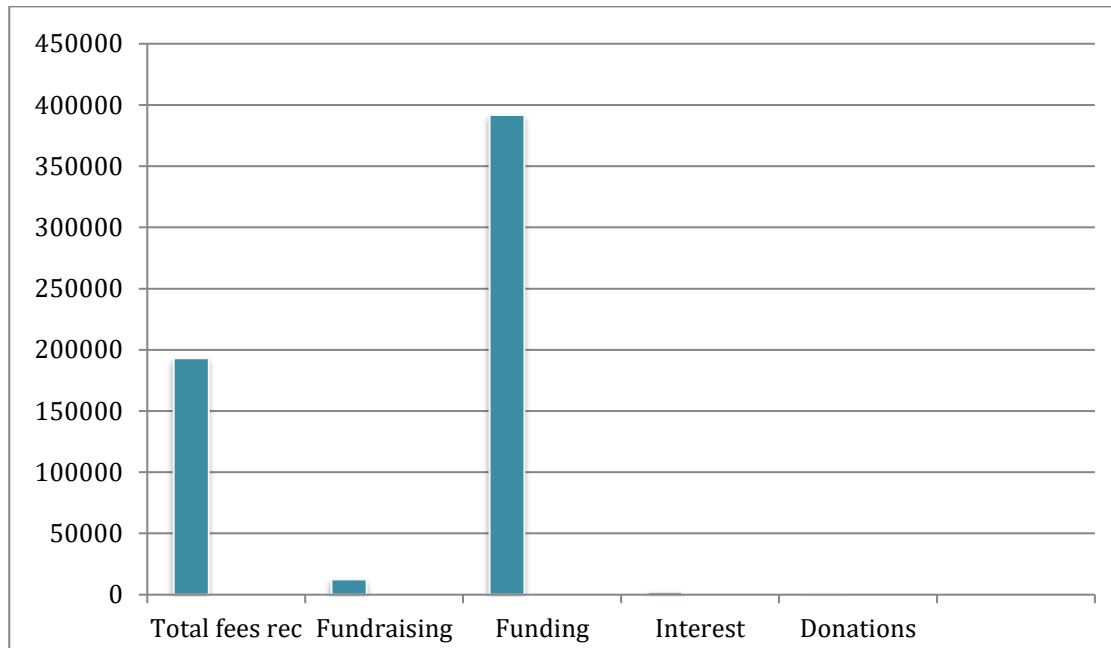
- a. To continue to provide the school with a financially stable foundation.
- b. To continue to build a social culture that provides our parents with a support network and in turn develops lifelong friendships.
- c. Continue to market the school and build enrolments.
- d. To outfit room downstairs for multipurpose learning area.



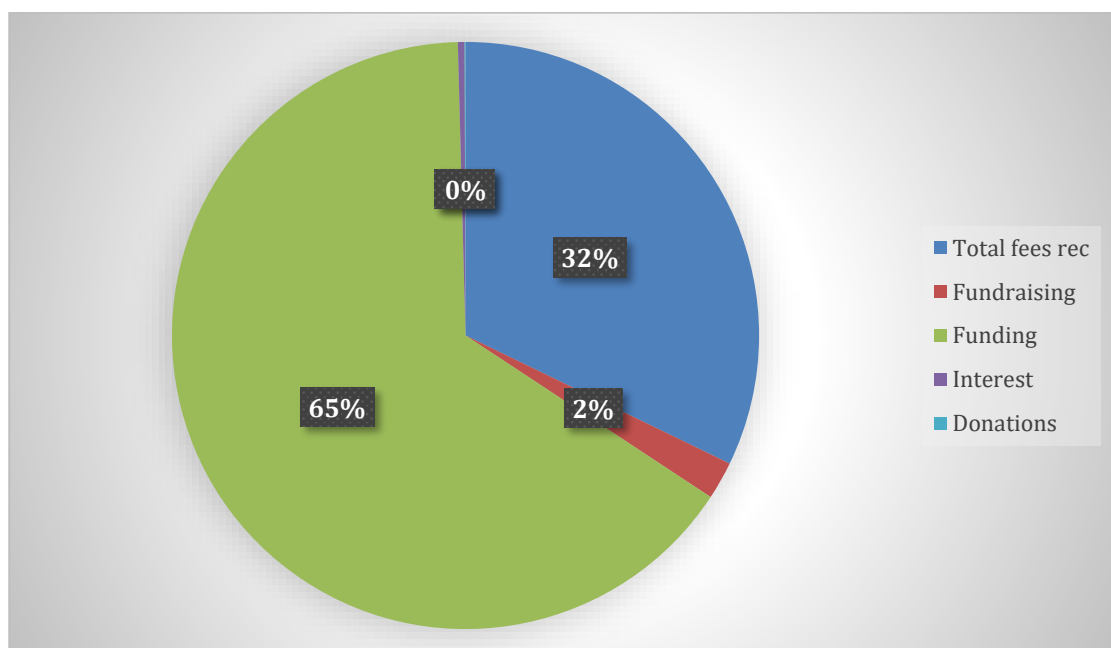
Fundraising artwork made by Kindergarten students

Summary financial information

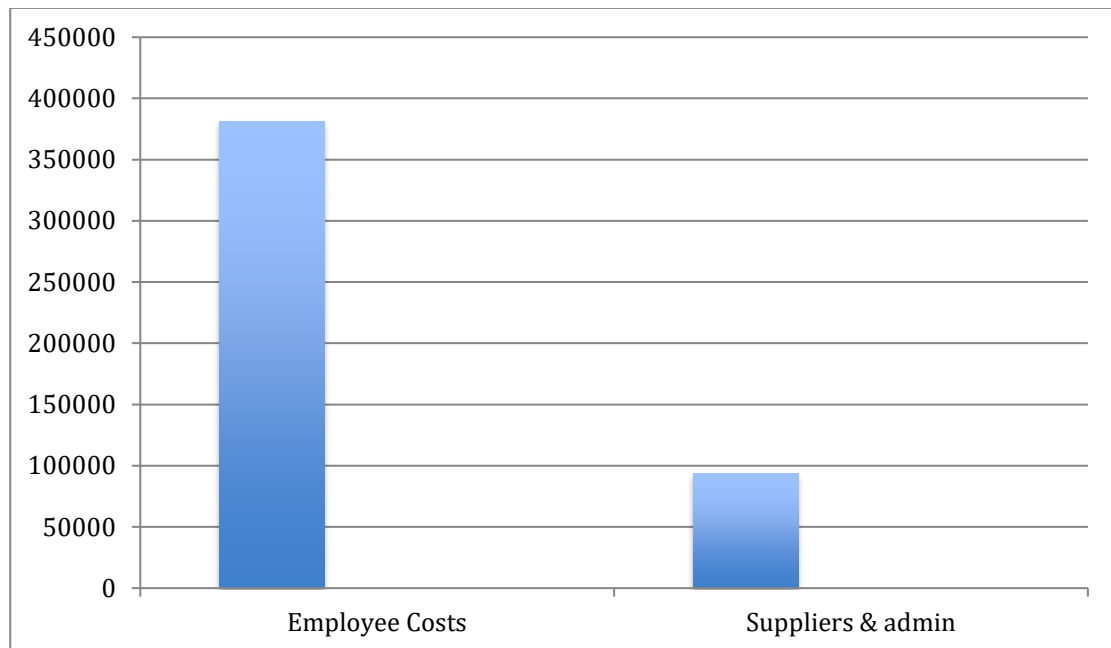
Revenue for 2020



Percentage of total revenue



Expenditure in 2019



Expenditure as a percentage of Total

