



# The Children's House Montessori School

## Annual Report 2023

109 Cressy Road, North Ryde, NSW 2113

Phone: 0298890400

Email: [childrenshousensw@gmail.com](mailto:childrenshousensw@gmail.com)

Website: <https://sydneymontessorisociety.nsw.edu.au>



*"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 NESAs. The details provided follow the prescribed list in the Registered and Accredited Individual Non-government Schools (NSW) Manual September 2023, 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 2023 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 five Council Members, four are Society Members and one who is the current Principal.

Current Council Members are:

Ariana Neuman	Chair
Melissa Tjakrawisada	Secretary
Shikha Chadha	Treasurer
Renee Collins	General
Denise Underwood	Principal

## *Chairperson's Report for 2023*

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

Regarding the business operations of the School, overall student enrolment is expected to remain robust, with a wait list now in operation for 2025, positioning the School favourably for next year. The Parent Toddler classes are also well attended, with 3 toddlers enrolled to attend the School in 2024. The school currently leases its premises from the City of Ryde and although a new lease has yet to be agreed upon, there has been no indication that the council plans to vacate the School at any stage in the future. The Council remains committed to nurturing our relationship with the City of Ryde.

Although the School reported a loss of \$7033 in 2023, it's on track to deliver a balanced outcome in 2024. In order to future-proof our School and mitigate risk, term 2 fee will increase to \$85 per week (with home environment fees remaining at \$10 per hour). As Denise wrote in her notice last term, it's unlikely that governments can continue to provide large-scale subsidies for schools in the current global macroeconomic backdrop. In the event the current subsidies are reduced or removed, the school fees will need to return to pre-subsidised levels, bridging any funding shortfalls and most importantly, ensuring continuity and minimal disruption for staff and families.

Education of the child and maximising student, parent and family involvement in our children's early childhood journey has always been an important part of the School's approach, since the SMS's founding in 1975. So far in 2024, there have been many opportunities for families to visit the School, including Guest Week, the Easter and Mother's Day morning teas. Thank you to all those who have coordinated and/or made the time to attend these events; we hope they provided you with an opportunity to observe what your child is capable of in a Montessori environment!

As a parent-run, Community School, the support from our parents is integral to our School's flourishing. I wish to thank parents for participating in fundraising and social events so far in 2024, especially the maintenance days, Bunnings BBQs and playdates. Your efforts do not go unnoticed by the Council, or the children! And we welcome your feedback about how what else we can or should be doing, either in the context of our School or local community.

The School's healthy balance sheet has also provided the Council with the opportunity to identify and undertake a number of key initiatives within our 2023-2025 business plan, including capital improvement programs for the building and outdoor spaces. Most recently this has included the commissioning of a mural artwork in the playground (in progress at time of writing!), as well as a scheduled playground equipment update and the development of a bush-tucker garden. These works are in part funded by our past fundraising efforts in previous years. We hope these initiatives and others like them help us continue to ensure a welcoming environment in which to conduct our children's Montessori education.

The School's dedicated staff team continue to deliver exceptional education outcomes for all children, as well as a caring and approachable environment for families. Staff morale is high and professional development opportunities for our teachers (as well as identifying potential future student-teacher recruits) continues to be a high priority for the school Council.

On behalf of the parent body, I wish to extend our deepest gratitude to Denise, Renae, Chandani, Natalie M, Natalie and Louise for your commitment, passion and loyalty to the School, which makes it what it is.

Ariana Neuman  
Chairperson

## *Treasurer's Report*

At a consolidated level, the school made a loss of (\$7033) in 2023, which was down from the (\$33000) loss made in the 2022 financial year. This is due to more state government funding for our preschoolers. 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 \$11572. 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 2023 program raised approximately \$6403, 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 2023. 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 2023, 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 have full classes from Term Two this year.



## ***Principal's Report***

We had a great year in 2023. 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. Although we still have a locked gate policy, parents were invited into the school on a regular basis. Parents understood that we only had one parent attend guest days to give everyone more space. Our children have been resilient and continue to thrive.

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.

We were able to have three parent information evenings in 2023 and these were well attended. It gave us an opportunity to discuss with our parents, the Montessori philosophy, and how it promotes child development in all areas. We were also able to have a family fun day at the end of the year. This was well attended. 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 2024.

The students gained an understanding of the larger community beyond the walls of the school through excursions to the Sydney Aquarium, the Koala Park, the Botanic Gardens and the Museum, which we did towards the end of the year. We continue to travel by minibus as most parents work, this allows for ease of supervision and provides the children with a different experience. We will continue using the bus for 2024.

I would like to thank the School Council for their support through 2023 and look forward to another eventful year in 2024.

Denise Underwood  
Principal





## ***Contextual information about the school***

### **Teaching Staff**

The teaching staff were consistent and stable in 2023. 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.

Teachers provided parents with the opportunity to experience the Montessori Method through three information evenings. These sessions 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 2023 was only \$2400; due to only online courses being available. 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-five percent are from an English speaking background with fifteen percent from non-English speaking background. One hundred percent of the staff are of the female gender with an average age of 55 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 to 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 38 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 2023, 9 children were eligible to attend our kindergarten class (Early Stage One). Out of the students who attended at the kindergarten stage, four were boys and five were girls. All but one student speaks 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 NES. 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 2023 was 85%.

## **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. Two students moved onto Catholic Schools in the area and three students moved onto the Montessori Primary School in Turramurra.

## ***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' held at the school. Updated policies can be viewed on our website.

In 2023, we reviewed and updated our philosophy.

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 their 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 seven 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 21 years, two for over 14 years, and two for 5 years. This demonstrates a commitment to the school, parents and children and shows their satisfaction re working conditions.

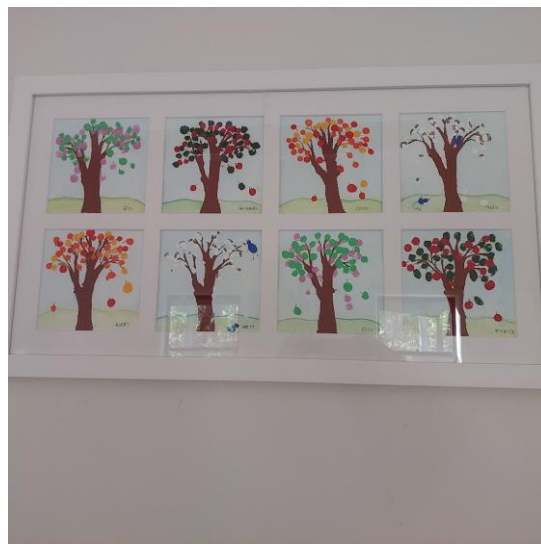
## Priority areas for improvement

The Children's House' priority areas for improvement in 2023 were all addressed throughout the year. They included:

- 1: Putting a new floor in the main classroom.
- 2: Communication with parents and community.
3. Updating and reviewing our Business Plan

Priority areas for improvement in 2024 are:

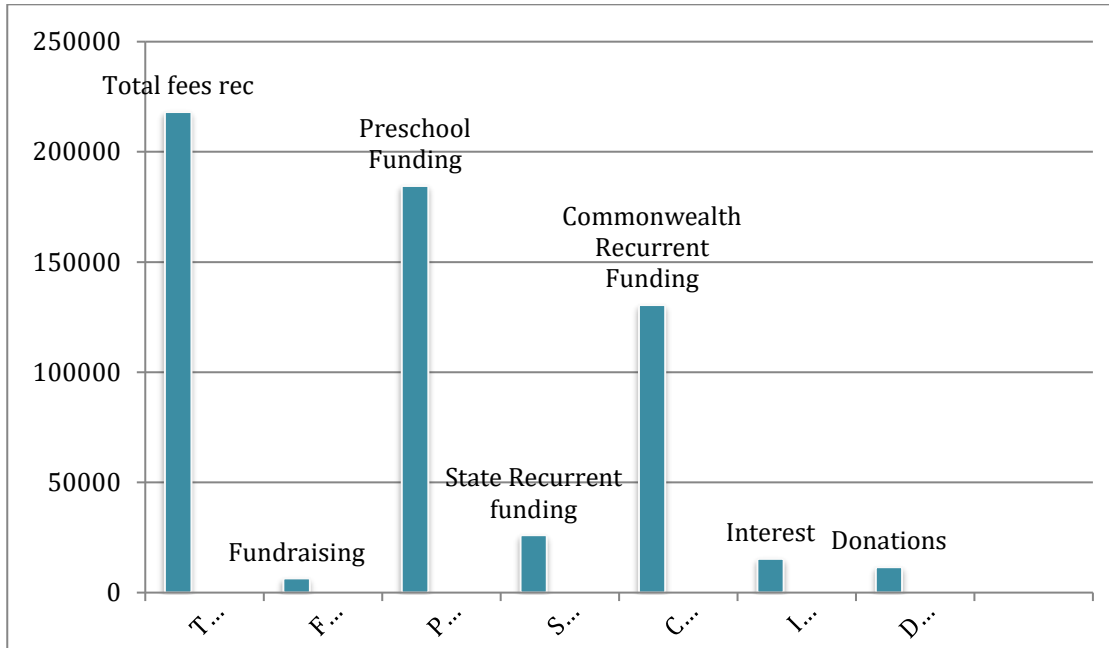
- a. To continue to provide the school with a financially stable foundation.
- b. To continue to build a social culture that provides our parents with a support network and in turn develops lifelong friendships.
- c. Continue to market the school and build enrolments.
- d. To improve the playground by changing the slide area, adding another shade cloth and a mural to one of the walls.



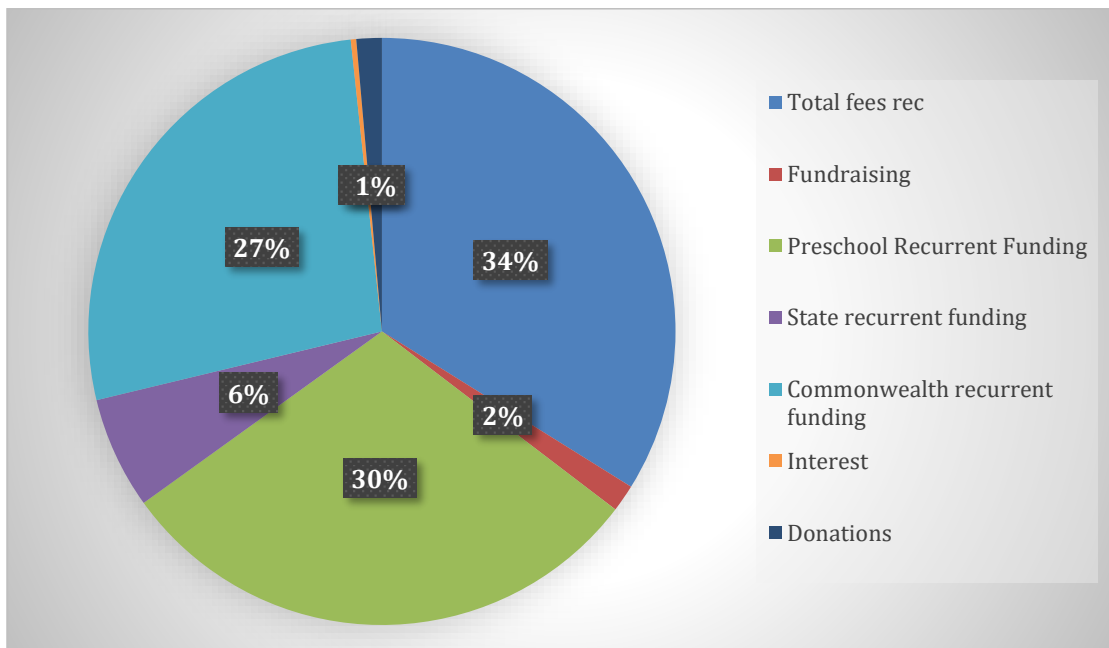
*Fundraising artwork made by Kindergarten students*

## Summary financial information

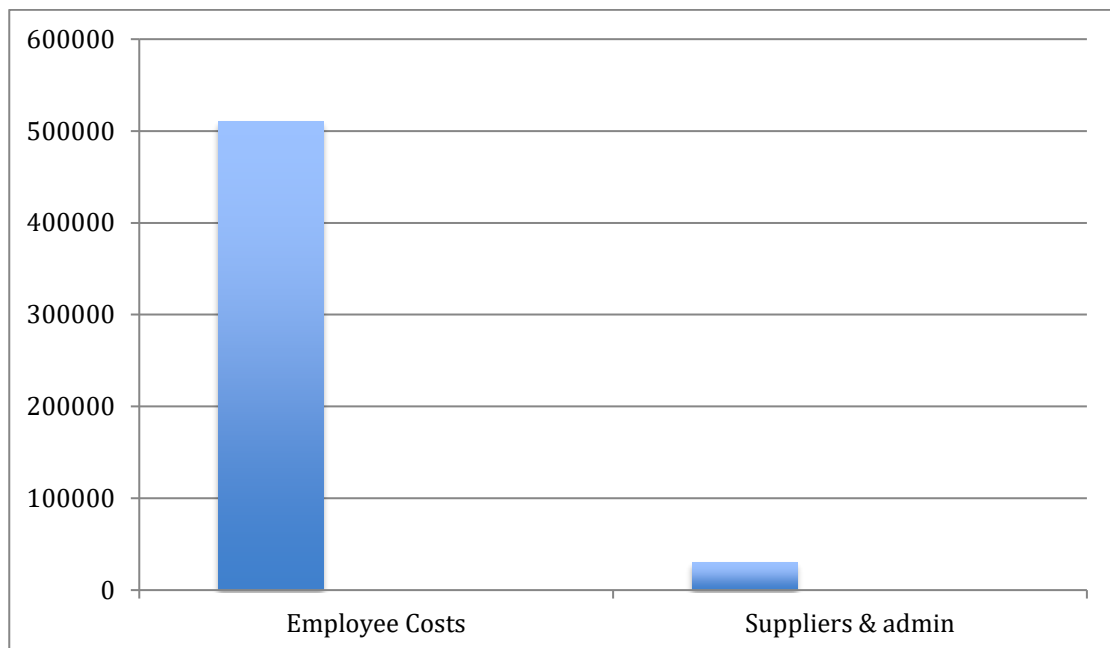
### Revenue for 2023



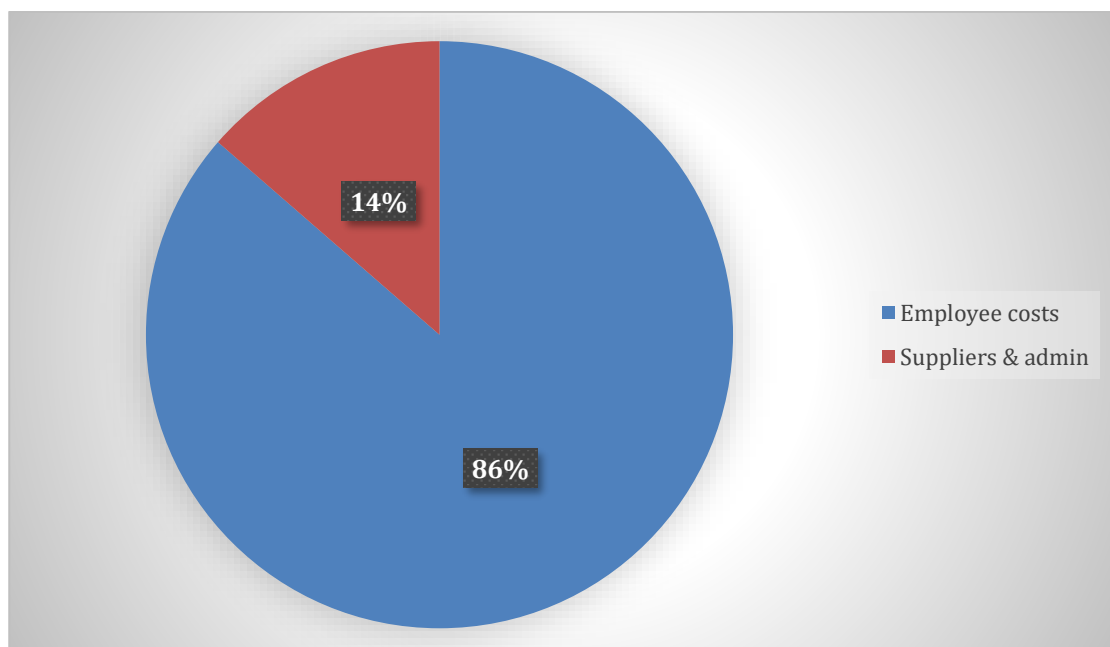
### Percentage of total revenue



## *Expenditure in 2023*



## *Expenditure as a percentage of Total*



This report is published on our website.

Website: <https://sydneymontessorisociety.nsw.edu.au>