



# Casa Family Handbook

Updated August, 2023

## **Mission Statement**

Boundary Bay Montessori School strives to provide a unique learning experience based on the principles researched and developed by Dr. Maria Montessori. At BBMS our mission is to help each individual child reach their fullest potential within a rich and stimulating environment. We recognize that each child is a unique being and see our role as facilitators in developing a love of learning.

## **Educational Philosophy**

Montessori is a scientific method of education developed by Dr. Maria Montessori over one hundred years ago. This method emphasizes the simple truth that children learn best when allowed to discover concepts on their own. As children move from area to area within a carefully prepared classroom environment, they absorb knowledge through their activities. Dr. Montessori believed children go through specific developmental levels, during which they exhibit different learning characteristics and needs. The role of the educator is to observe and gently guide children, facilitating their learning and instilling a deep sense of personal independence and responsibility to self, to others, and to nature. Montessori saw education as a means whereby children might develop their personalities so as to eventually achieve an independent and mature adulthood. The foundation in which the child's personality is formed can be achieved when we offer the best guidance and environment in order to help the child reach their full potential.

## **Who We Are**

Nestled in a pastoral setting between the mountains and the ocean in the heart of rural Ladner, our school provides opportunities for natural curiosity, child-led exploration, and an abundance of safe risky-play.

## **The Prepared Environment**

The Montessori classroom is commonly referred to as a “Prepared Environment”. This name reflects the care and attention that is given to creating a learning environment that will reinforce the children’s independence and intellectual development. The prepared environment includes the classroom furnishings, the materials and teachers working within it. A Montessori class is composed of a three-year grouping of children. Classes tend to be stable communities with only the oldest third moving on to the next level each year.

Our school supports whole child development. Nurturing social, emotional, physical, and cognitive development allows each child to develop at their own learning pace with respect for each other and our learning environment. Serving children 2.5-5 years, our classroom is a child’s community with child size furnishings and age-appropriate activities. Children develop an inner sense of order, independence, and an innate ability to concentrate. The environment both inside and outside is rich with materials fostering awareness of math, reading, geography, science, and daily living. Through the idea of “work,” the child plays in a stimulating environment that nurtures the whole child in the areas of Sensorial, Math, Language, Culture and Practical Life. Your child will receive individualized attention in an environment that supports creative and critical thinking, communication, collaboration and promotes a sense of well-being and belonging. Most importantly, we have fun doing so.

## **The Unprepared Environment – Outdoor Learning**

Caring for the outside environment at our rurally located school, fosters social responsibility of our natural world. In addition to the more traditional reading and writing activities associated with seed to plant life cycles, the children plant, weed and harvest in the outdoor gardens. Furthermore, we learn about the medicinal and practical benefits of native plants, as we discuss First Nation Peoples’ use of plants and reverence for the land. We observe, discuss, and reflect in this area of our classroom as we do in all other areas of our learning.

We recognize the importance of outdoor play in an unprepared environment; that outside unstructured play builds confidence and leads to independence in children. A child’s play is a fundamental way for them to make sense of the world around them. Research makes clear that when play is unstructured and has an element of risk and creativity, it benefits the development of self-confidence, resilience, executive functioning abilities, and even risk management skills.

## **Guiding and Caring Strategies**

We fully embrace and put into practice the principles of the BC Early Learning Framework, the BC Early Childhood Educators Code of Ethics, and First Peoples Principles of Learning. We acknowledge and respect the diversity of belief systems of families in our program.

Emotional and social well-being builds a foundation for all other areas of learning. Our role as educators is to nurture and care for children in a respectful way, offering guidance as needed. We strive to create safe spaces for children so they feel comfortable exploring their wide-ranging emotions.

Children learn about the world around them through observation and imitation. We use a variety of strategies to teach pro-social behaviours, including modelling, role playing, stories, and working cooperatively.

While supporting children's challenging behaviours, we are guided by an 'Image of the Child' that views children as inherently intelligent and capable. Our communications with children are fluid and responsive, aiding the child while not entirely solving their conflicts for them.

We also recognize that at times the needs of the group will take precedence over an individual child's preferences. Our responsibility lies in caring for each child's precious heart and mind while also meeting the needs of the group.

When there is a conflict or a child is finding it challenging to work cooperatively with others, we first spend time together; listening, offering words and choices when appropriate. There are occasions when a child may find it difficult to control their emotions. In such circumstances, we use time away, with an educator, as a calming time, rather than using 'time out' as a punishment for misbehaviour.

Working together with families, we can teach children to be resilient, not just physically, but also emotionally. When incidents arise, your child's teachers will discuss their observations with you and together, create a support plan toward resolving the problem.

If you have questions or concerns about our guidance policies, please speak with us so that communication remains open.

### **Casa program and Kindergarten Year**

Socially, young children develop a sense of self as part of a community of learners. Children often work together, play games, and present materials to younger students as mastery is achieved. Circle Time provides an opportunity to build confidence when speaking to a group, presenting lessons, and enjoying music and movement activities. As children grow in the classroom, they take on roles of increasing leadership, fostering a deep respect for others and their work, and an awareness of their own agency both in relationships and in the greater world.

In our multi-age classroom younger children have the freedom to seek assistance from their older peers. This builds the confidence and abilities of our older students while increasing the learning opportunities of younger students. The Kindergarten year allows the student to take on more of a leadership role in the classroom, assuming greater responsibilities and solidifying learning. This will happen naturally, because it was previously modelled, and children look

forward to being one of the “big kids” in the classroom. Kindergarten students benefit from the extended day program as they have more lessons in the afternoon session with their Directress, allowing them to dig deeper into their learning and to focus on areas with support as needed. The Kindergarten students will join the Lower Elementary classroom for afternoon work cycles and also enjoy extra-curricular activities such as Music, French, Art, field trips and Physical Education.

**Hours/schedule**

School Operations

i. Office Hours

Office hours are 8:00-4:00 Monday to Friday. When phoning the school, if your call is not received during this time, your message will be returned promptly. Messages left outside of these hours will be returned the next school day.

ii. School Hours

| <b>Table 1. School Hours</b>                  |                              |
|---|------------------------------|
| <b>Before school hours</b>                    | <b>7:30 am –<br/>8:30 am</b> |
| <b>Casa Program</b>                           | <b>8:30 am –<br/>3:00 pm</b> |
| <b>Kindergarten &amp; Elementary Programs</b> | <b>8:30 am –<br/>3:00 pm</b> |

Please note that there is NO supervision by BBMS staff of students provided before 8:30 am unless they are in before school care (BSC), and after 3:00 pm unless enrolled in Out of School Care (OSC). Children who are on the school grounds outside of school hours are the SOLE responsibility of their parents/guardians. If you require BSC or OSC, please contact the office. Please note that BSC is not available to Preschool students.

iii. Out-of-School Care (K-7)

| <b>Table 2. Out-of-School Hours</b>           |                       |
|---|-----------------------|
| <b>Before School Care (5 to 12 year olds)</b> | <b>7:30 – 8:30 am</b> |
| <b>After School Care (5 to 12 year olds)</b>  | <b>3:00 – 5:30 pm</b> |

Please note that OSC is not available to Preschool students.

#### iv. Weather Closures

In the case of school closure due to inclement weather (snow) and power outages (wind), families will be informed through our communication system by email/text on a daily basis as to the school's operational status. Generally, this communication will occur at approximately 7:00 am each morning of the school closure. In addition, the Head of School will contact the radio stations CBC (88.1 FM) and News 1130 (1130 AM; <http://www.news1130.com>) to provide a school closure notification.

#### **Gradual entry**

Gradual entry is an allocated period of time to facilitate the Casa-aged child's immersion into our program. The first week of acceptance will be for one hour, the second and third weeks will be two to three hours, with a plan to move to full hours by the fourth week. Please note that we realise scheduling can and may be adjusted according to the social/emotional readiness of your child. If you feel your child will need a little more time to adjust, please speak with us. Classroom directresses may also recommend adjustments to entry depending on the needs and developmental stage of the child.

#### **Parent involvement**

Parent involvement is highly encouraged. Many opportunities exist throughout the school year to connect with the whole school community. Volunteer hours can be gained through supporting your child's classroom by helping directresses with various jobs. This may be gardening, assisting with outdoor projects, minor fix-it jobs, or sharing your expertise by visiting our classroom and sharing during group time. Parent collaboration and involvement in your child's learning leads to a deeper understanding of our program and a stronger connection to your child's learning community.

#### **Clothing**

##### i. Student Clothing

Students wear slippers or indoor shoes at all times inside the school. Please purchase simple indoor footwear in terms of colour and design. We recommend shoes or slippers with rubber soles, so that feet will remain dry in the event of an emergency evacuation.

BBMS students are not required to wear uniforms, however we stress the importance of purchasing clothing for your child which does not include marketing symbols and cartoon additions. This type of clothing creates distractions for the children and can be used for the purposes of exclusion between children.

Each Kindergarten student registered in the school is required to purchase a school jacket for use throughout the school year. While this jacket may be worn at any time during the year, it is mandatory that each child wear the jacket on school field trips. The school jackets allow our students to be seen and quickly located in large public locations. Please "personalize" your child's jacket by writing their name on the inner label.

## ii. Personal Belongings

The materials in the classroom, and those distributed to the children by school staff provide a wealth of learning experiences. Please do not allow your child to bring toys to school. These items create distractions and shift students' focus from purposeful education experiences. Artifacts or cultural items which complement an ongoing classroom theme are welcome at any time. However, the school cannot be responsible for the loss or damage of personal items.

It is recommended that your child use a backpack to carry school work to and from school. Student cell phones and electronic games are not allowed at school, except with special permission from the student's classroom teacher. Students who bring these devices to school are asked to keep them in their backpacks until the close of the school day.

## **Contacting Directresses**

### i. Communications

Every Thursday or Friday a newsletter will provide calendar and current school event updates. Information on special events specific to individual classrooms will be detailed here or via the classroom Directress' own email notification.

### ii. School Calendar

Our annual School Calendar is available on our website under the tab "community".

### iii. Bulletin Boards

Bulletin boards are located on the casa porch and on the porch of the main school building.

### iv. Meeting with Classroom Directresses

We ask that if you require a meeting with the teaching team, please book a formal appointment by email or phone. Classroom Directresses can be contacted as follows:

| <b>Table 4. Classroom Directresses Email Addresses</b> |                                     |
|--|-------------------------------------|
| <b>Casa-Preschool</b>                                  | <b>preschool@bbmschool.ca</b>       |
| <b>Casa-Kindergarten</b>                               | <b>kindergarten@bbmschool.ca</b>    |
| <b>Lower Elementary Directresses</b>                   | <b>lowerelementary@bbmschool.ca</b> |
| <b>Upper Elementary Directresses</b>                   | <b>upperelementary@bbmschool.ca</b> |
| <b>French Directress</b>                               | <b>french@bbmschool.ca</b>          |
| <b>Music Directress</b>                                | <b>music@bbmschool.ca</b>           |

### **Celebrations**

Whilst we recognise that celebrations are important to children, we tend to steer away from overly commercialized holidays such as Halloween and Valentines Day. We do however celebrate each child’s birthday with a trip around the sun-providing an opportunity to celebrate the uniqueness of each child. We also learn through stories and participation in project-based activities of various cultural celebrations worldwide. This demonstrates how celebrations are important to people and deepens our understanding of diversity.

### **Visitors and volunteers**

Visitors and volunteers are welcome to join us in the Casa classroom to learn more about the philosophy and teaching approach. All visitors and volunteers connect with classroom directress(es) and administration before a suitable time is arranged and necessary paperwork approved.

Parents of classroom children are welcome to observe in the classroom during school observation week. Educational or prospective student tours may also take place.

### **School Policies and Procedures**

Please visit our website to read our school’s policies. Click on the tab “Community”, followed by “Communication”. The policies listed below are covered therein:

Active Play Policy

Behavioural Guidance Policy

Emergency Plan and Procedure Policy

Health and Safety Policy

Health, Illness and Medication Procedure Policy

Missing and Wandering Children Policy

Nutrition Policy

Repayment Agreement Policy

Reportable Incident Procedure Policy

Safe Release of Children Policy

School Bus Transportation Policy

Screen Time Use Policy

Transportation Policy