

Montessori PARENT GUIDE



Choosing Montessori for Your Young Child

What do you need to know to choose a Montessori early childhood education for your child?



Choosing an education for your child is one of the most important decisions you may make as a parent.

Being informed about your choices helps you to make good decisions for your family, your child and their future. Montessori is a philosophy. There is diversity within the Montessori community worldwide and each school is unique, reflecting its interpretation and practice of Montessori philosophy, the staff and parent-family community, the facilities and resources available and the vision of the centre or school.

Parents frequently ask: 'So, how do I know it is really Montessori?'

What are the essential elements of Montessori education? What should you be looking for when you are considering a Montessori education for your young child?

Your Parent Guide will help you to better understand Montessori education and to find answers to your questions about Montessori for three - six year olds.

Your Parent Guide is in three sections:

- The Montessori Learning Community
- The Montessori Learning Environment
- Montessori Adults

In each section we have identified the following:

- **Essential Elements** ... are provided to help you better understand what Montessori can offer your child.
- **What it looks like** ... examples are given of how the essential element may 'look' in practice.
- **Questions to ask Montessori centre staff** some questions that you could ask the Montessori centre staff are provided.
- **Questions to ask yourself** ... by observing in a Montessori early childhood centre you can answer some of your own questions.

This parent guide may help you answer the question 'Can Montessori early childhood establish a profound emotional, spiritual and academic base for my child's future?'

What do you need to know to choose a Montessori early childhood education for your child?

How to Find the Answers to Your Questions

You will know what questions are important for you as you make choices for your child.

Montessori Aotearoa New Zealand recommends visiting and observing more than one Montessori early childhood centre.

Take time to observe the community of children. Visit the centre more than once. Deepen your understanding of what each Montessori early childhood centre has to offer your child.

You could also visit other early childhood centres to understand how Montessori early childhood communities offer a different experience for children in the early childhood years.

If possible, visit a Montessori primary class in your area and see where Montessori can take primary-aged children.

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Montessori Learning Community (3 - 6)



What ages are children in Montessori early childhood centres?

Essential Element

All Montessori learning communities are characterised by multi-aged groupings of at least three years.

What this results in ...

In Montessori early childhood centres children start around three years of age and stay until they are six years old.

The children in the class are a mix of ages - eg. not just three and four-year-olds.

There is no segregation by age into separate morning and afternoon classes, or different rooms/areas during the day.

The mixed age offers the opportunity for a child to grow into a teaching role; this gives immense satisfaction to the older child and offers a way to internalise their learning. The best teacher of a child is often another child.

Young children are not separated into 'new entrant' classes, since they will not benefit from learning from the older children in the class.

The mixed age group allows the children to develop socially, intellectually and emotionally - it is an essential part of any Montessori centre.

Questions you could ask the Montessori centre staff

How does your centre decide when my child is ready to start in the Montessori classroom?

What is the optimal age to start? Why?

How will my three-year-old get on with the bigger five-year-olds?

How are older children encouraged to 'teach' the younger children - how do they help?

Questions you could ask yourself while you observe the class

Can I see children of all ages in the class from under three to over five years?

Do I see children segregated by age groupings or can I see children interacting across the age groups?

Can I see older children 'teaching' younger children and being encouraged by the adults to take on this mentoring role?

How often does my child need to attend?

Essential Element

Children attend their Montessori learning community and interact with the same group of children and teachers each day, ideally attending five mornings or when they are a little older, five full days.

What this results in ...

The Montessori learning community develops when children regularly experience safe and secure relationships with familiar adults, socialise with other children who are well known to them and experience predictable, established daily routines.

Regular attendance enables the development of a Montessori culture of empowerment and consistency.

Questions you could ask the Montessori centre staff

Would my child come in the mornings and how many mornings are preferable for my child to attend?

Montessori Learning Community (3 - 6)

Is there an expected routine pattern of attendance required?

When could my child start staying in Montessori all day?

Is there a settling in period or trial period when my child first begins?

Questions you could ask yourself while you observe the class

Does the learning community feel peaceful and do the children appear secure and well-connected to each other and the teachers?

Why is a respectful community important in Montessori?

Essential Element

The Montessori classroom is a community in which everyone learns from one another and everyone's contribution is valued and respected.

What this results in ...

The children will feel at home with their peers and in the learning environment.

Children will understand classroom routines and be able to ask for help, find what they need and choose their activities confidently.

The classroom functions as a community with each child playing his or her own part and contributing to the daily life and functioning of the class in a positive manner.

The children will interact with kindness and support, celebrating each other's progress.

Children will seek and offer feedback, ask and offer help not only to their teachers, but to each other.

Questions you could ask the Montessori centre staff

How is my child going to be helped to learn the routines of the environment?

What other daily routines or expectations are there to build a community of kind, supportive children?

Why is there only one of each activity available in the classroom? How does this help them to learn?

Questions you could ask yourself while you observe the class

Can I see children confidently asking adults and older children for help?

Do the teachers respond respectfully, modeling the behaviour expected of the children?

Do I see the children interacting with each other in nurturing and respectful ways?

How do I see conflict being resolved?

Is respect, social graces and team work evident in the learning community?

How long do children attend a Montessori early childhood centre?

Essential Element

The most optimal experience is gained when the child experiences a three-year Montessori early childhood programme, from around three until six years of age.

What this results in ...

The importance of this three-year programme is to enable the child to integrate all the experience of the earlier years and to develop social maturity.

Children starting later or finishing Montessori earlier will not make all the gains possible from a full three-year Montessori programme.

In New Zealand many children leave Montessori at five to attend state primary school, but a growing number of parents are deciding to keep their child in Montessori after their fifth birthday and start primary school as six-year-olds.

Questions you could ask the Montessori centre staff

What is the centre's policy about the age at which children start and leave the Montessori classroom?

Do you start children in Montessori after their fourth birthday or is the preference to start as three-year-olds?

How many five-year-olds do you have in the classroom and what leadership roles do they have?

How will my child benefit from this Montessori classroom after five years of age?

Montessori Learning Community (3 - 6)

Questions you could ask yourself while you observe the class

Are there children in the classroom spanning all the ages from under three to over five years?

Are the five-year-olds engaged meaningfully in their work?

How do children socialise in Montessori?

Essential Element

Each child's individualised activity occurs within a community of children and adults and spontaneous social interactions occur throughout the day.

What this results in ...

Children interact with each other freely and show kindness to each other.

Children interact respectfully with each other and the adults, and are guided by their peers and teachers to develop appropriate social skills.

Large group activities occur rarely and children can choose to join in.

Children are supported by teachers to interact with each other and are free to choose to work and talk with each other, while respecting the other child's right to work without interruption.

Questions you could ask the Montessori centre staff

What do you do when children are in conflict?

How do you help children to learn the skills of interacting appropriately in the classroom?

How do you facilitate large group activities?

If there are large group activities how is each child's individual work protected?

Questions you could ask yourself while you observe the class

Do I see examples of children offering to help another child?

Are the children careful of disturbing another child's work?

Do I see responsive, respectful relationships between teachers-children, children-children, between teachers and between teachers and families?

Can I observe children learning and using strategies to solve disagreements peacefully?

How will my child's interests and needs be met?

Essential Element

Montessori teachers are skilled in 'following the child' and responding to the changing interests and needs of each child as a unique and dynamic individual.

What this results in ...

Children select and engage in activities which are interesting to them.

Teachers know the children well and respond to their unique interests and needs, engaging parents in this process.

Each child's individual needs are assessed through observation so when the child is developmentally ready new concepts and activities are introduced.

The learning opportunities in the classroom are frequently changed to cater for the needs and interests of the current group of learners.

Questions you could ask the Montessori centre staff

If my child shows an interest in a particular area how is this responded to in the classroom? Can you give me some recent examples of this?

What would you do if my child was engaged in an activity and did not want to join a group time?

How will I know what my child does each day and what is being planned for his/her learning? What feedback will I get from the staff?

What opportunities are there for me to interact with staff about my child?

Questions you could ask yourself while you observe the class

Are children choosing and focusing on their own chosen activity?

How does the staff respond to the questions and interests of the children?

Can I see children choosing what they would like to work on or is it predominantly teacher directed?

Montessori Learning Community (3 - 6)

Are children encouraged to question? Are they given the freedom to seek out answers to the questions they have come up with?

Are children able to work without frequent interruptions from the teacher?

Will my child have fun?

Essential Element

Montessori learning environments meet the developmental needs of children in a safe, interesting and caring community.

What this results in ...

Children are relaxed and confident with their classmates and teachers. Learning is fun and children find joy in their discoveries and in the activities they choose each day.

Questions you could ask the Montessori centre staff

Is this a place where my child will have fun?
What do you enjoy about being with children each day?

Questions you could ask yourself while you observe the class

Do the children and adults look like they are enjoying themselves?
Will my child have fun in this learning community?

Montessori Learning Environment (3 - 6)



Is there a Montessori curriculum?

Essential Element

The daily practice of Montessori philosophy is made possible by a clearly defined Montessori curricular framework.

What this results in ...

The Montessori curriculum includes practical life¹, sensorial², language, mathematics, botany, geography, art, music, drama, and environmental studies and more! When you look around a Montessori classroom you are seeing the Montessori curriculum in all the activities and materials on the shelves.

Questions you could ask the Montessori centre staff

How does the Montessori philosophy define the daily activities and routines of the classroom?

Can you describe to me what the Montessori curriculum is and how it supports my child's learning?

What if my child spends all day with one thing, or is interested in only one thing - how do you get them to engage in other aspects of the curriculum?

Do children always get to choose what they do, or are they guided to broaden their horizons?

Questions you could ask yourself while you observe the class

Can I see children engaged with different activities from across all curriculum areas?

If a child is wandering about how are the teachers/other children interacting with them?

How does the teacher guide and support the children to choose an activity?

Note:

1. Practical Life activities include skills that young children enjoy learning and love to repeat; sweeping, polishing, tying bows, dusting, preparing food; engagement in these activities builds concentration and coordination.
2. Montessori sensorial materials are unique and enable young children to explore and discover shape, size, colour, texture, weight, sound, taste and smell.

What are Montessori materials?

Essential Element

Learners in Montessori are exposed to many complex concepts at an early age through the use of the specially-designed Montessori materials. These hands-on learning materials enable the learner to literally see and explore abstract concepts.

What this results in ...

The focus of a Montessori classroom is on the creative exploration by the child of the Montessori materials and activities, not on plastic toys, puzzles, workbooks etc.

Children are free and encouraged to explore using the Montessori materials - the teacher does not insist on one 'proper' use of material but encourages the children's open-ended exploration and experimentation, while encouraging a respect for the materials.

Montessori activities are purposeful, real, and exploratory and have a cycle of activity for the child to follow.

All Montessori activities are limited in number - only one of most activities, including art, so that children come to respect each item as a special and unique piece of equipment. They learn to develop patience as they wait for a turn, and they have many options available to them in the classroom so they learn to make alternative choices, rather than watching and waiting.

Montessori Learning Environment (3 - 6)

The Montessori materials have an inbuilt 'control of error', so the child discovers for herself when she needs to keep problem solving; no adult assistance is needed.

Children become comfortable with making mistakes, trying again, develop problem-solving skills and the ability to see a task through to completion without adult direction.

Montessori learning materials are beautifully created and presented in a way which appeals to the child.

The Montessori materials are developed to create opportunities for success rather than failure.

Questions you could ask the Montessori centre staff

How does the Montessori philosophy define the daily activities and routines of the classroom?

Can you describe to me what the Montessori curriculum is and how it supports my child's learning?

If my child spends all day with one thing, or is interested in only one thing - how do you get them to engage in other aspects of the curriculum?

Do children always get to choose what they do, how do you guide them to broaden their horizons?

Questions you could ask yourself while you observe the class

Are there lots of 'toys' in the classroom - puzzles, plastic toys, etc?

Is there only one of each activity and what do the children do when they both want to do the same activity?

Are the children engaged with the Montessori hands-on learning materials or are there lots of worksheets, colouring or copying exercises and 'book' work?

How does Montessori promote my child's learning?

Essential Element

Montessori focuses on children's learning and self discovery, not on teachers 'teaching' and fostering independence is an important part of Montessori philosophy.

What this results in ...

Children work individually or in small, self-selected groups. There will be very few, if any, whole group lessons.

Self-directed children are encouraged to work independently with minimal teacher direction once they have been introduced to a range of new learning activities.

The children are able to access all activities independently or with help of a peer, without relying on constant adult assistance or direction.

There should be no requirements for children to participate in particular kinds of work.

The child is left to choose their own work, but is presented with new work regularly to increase their repertoire of choice and provide more opportunities for them to uncover their interests.

The Montessori child is put in charge of his/her own learning through their own exploration; this may seem a subtle distinction but it is a key part of the Montessori approach.

Questions you could ask the Montessori centre staff

What activities will my child be able to do when they first start in the class?

How does my child know what to choose each day and how do you guide his choice?

What do you do if my child always avoids particular activities?

What kind of expectations do you have of children at different ages?

What will the teacher do if my child chooses the same activity day after day?

What kind of work and activities will my child be introduced to as a three-year-old, four-year-old, and five-year-old?

How will I know what my child has been doing and what learning has been taking place - how do you communicate with parents?

Questions you could ask yourself while you observe the class

Are the majority of children making constructive independent choices or are the teachers constantly directing and correcting?

Are children being given time to engage, time to observe, time to chill; are the children given the freedom to work things out for themselves?

Montessori Learning Environment (3 - 6)

Is the teacher giving individual children 'lessons' with minimal talking or interruption?

Is the teacher focused on the child he/she is giving the lesson to, while maintaining an awareness of rest of the class?

How will my child develop concentration?

Essential Element

Dr Montessori discovered that young children desire to be active for long periods of time in concentrated activity.

If interrupted by group work or whole class activities children are not able to reach a state of deep focus and choose work that needs only a superficial involvement.

What this results in ...

The class has uninterrupted daily work/activity time with the ideal being a three-hour period.

This work/activity period should be free from interruption for whole group activities such as snack or mat time or group learning where all children must join in.

This work/activity time does not include whole group outdoor playtime or communal celebrations - these activities should be in addition to the three-hour work cycle.

The class has an atmosphere of calm with young children concentrating for periods of time that may surprise you.

Questions you could ask the Montessori centre staff

How long is your work/activity cycle?

Why is a long uninterrupted period of time important for my child's learning?

Do you have any additional activities happening and how do you ensure this does not interrupt the long work/activity cycle?

When my child needs to rest what will he do?

Questions you could ask yourself while you observe the class

Do the children have a long uninterrupted time or are there frequent interruptions for set activities or whole group times?

Are the majority of the children able to complete a cycle of activity - from choosing an activity, engaging with concentration, finishing when they feel satisfied, cleaning the work and returning it to the shelves for another child to use?

Does Montessori happen only at specific times?

Essential Element

Montessori is a way of being - it does not stop and start at specific times or only occur indoors!

What this results in ...

The whole Montessori learning environment is available to all children - there should be no restriction by age to certain curriculum areas.

The Montessori learning environment should not be limited to specific shelves or areas or rooms within the centre.

The child has access to quality Montessori environments and programmes throughout the day; if the centre offers before/after-school care or holiday care it should follow the same principles as the Montessori classroom.

Outdoor environments are used as rich learning experiences for the children in the same way as the indoors - activities are purposeful, real, explorative and have a cycle of activity.

Questions you could ask the Montessori centre staff

Can you explain how my child will access the whole indoor and outdoor learning environment?

I am worried my child will be too tired to 'do Montessori' for long periods - can you explain how this will work for my child?

Questions you could ask yourself while you observe the class

Are the outdoor environments being used as rich learning experiences for the children in the same manner as indoors - activities that are purposeful, real, explorative and have a cycle of activity?

Are children moving freely from the indoor to outdoor environment during the session?

Montessori Learning Environment (3 - 6)

How does the environment make learning accessible?

Essential Element

The Montessori environment is orderly and structured to facilitate the child to make independent choices for their learning.

What this results in ...

The learning opportunities in the classroom are frequently changed to cater for the needs and interests of the current group of learners.

Learning materials are arranged in curriculum areas eg. practical life, sensorial, language, mathematics, and environmental studies.

The classroom is structured so that children can find anything they are interested in and learn quickly where things are.

All learning materials are attractive so the child is enticed to use them - aesthetically pleasing, clean, complete and in good repair.

The children have real opportunities to develop motor control and to perfect their movements - the classroom has child-sized furniture that is light and can be moved, floors that do not deaden noise or prevent breakages, and activities use breakable materials such as glass, and china. There should be little plastic!

Everything in the classroom is size appropriate for the child - from furniture to crockery to woodwork tools. The colour of the furnishings, floors, and walls should be soft and muted with limited wall displays so that the brightly-coloured Montessori materials attract the children and focus their attention.

Questions you could ask the Montessori centre staff

Can you explain how the classroom is structured to help my child become independent?

Why is it important that the classroom is orderly and beautiful? How does this help my child's learning?

What will happen if my child does not put something back in the 'right place'?

My child is very messy at home - how will he/she cope in this orderly environment?

How does the orderly environment promote creativity in my child? Can my child still be spontaneous and inventive?

Questions you could ask yourself while you observe the class

Do the children return their activities to their proper place - ready for the next child to use?

Can I see children confidently using real implements to do 'real' tasks?

Can I see children of all ages using lots of china and glass - plates, cups, dishes etc?

Can the children access everything they need without adult help?

What is practical life?

Essential Element

Children have daily opportunities to learn and use practical life skills which enable them to develop concentration and to care for their environment, themselves, and others in the community.

What this results in ...

The young child is provided with real implements and given real responsibilities in the care of the environment and care of the self.

Children prepare morning tea and/or lunch, water the plants, feed and care for the animals, clean and polish materials, sweep the floor and work in the garden.

Practical life materials have an observable application in the classroom. If Montessori children cook, they prepare food that can be shared with classmates.

Flowers are arranged by the children to beautify the room, windows are cleaned, shoes polished, gardens dug, peas picked.

Children take the initiative to actively care for each other and their environment.

Questions you could ask the Montessori centre staff

How are the children encouraged to care for their class each day?

Do you have animals and how do the children help care for them?

What kind of cooking and food preparation do the children do each day?

How are the older children involved in taking responsibility for the class and other children?

Montessori Learning Environment (3 - 6)

How does doing 'Practical Life' prepare my child for more academic work?

Questions you could ask yourself while you observe the class

Can I see children taking real responsibility for their classroom?

Are the children encouraged and assisted to develop a sense of ownership for their class and classroom routines?

Do the children spontaneously show care for each other?

How is Montessori a holistic approach to children's learning?

Essential Element

The Montessori environment is rich with learning opportunities for the young child to explore his culture and the world.

What this results in ...

Social, emotional and spiritual learning experiences are valued as highly as intellectual learning experiences.

Rich cultural experiences including music, art, singing, drama, celebrations from other cultures, plant and animal studies, are a feature of the classroom.

The children have opportunities to garden, care for animals and observe nature as part of their daily programme.

Tikanga Maori and Te Reo Maori are incorporated throughout the whole programme and all curriculum areas to reflect the society and time in which the children live.

Questions you could ask the Montessori centre staff

How are the cultures of the world celebrated in this class?

How is Te Reo Maori introduced to the children?

What opportunities does my child have to explore the community beyond the centre?

Can you show me some examples of how my child will learn about his and other cultures?

How are the rhythms of nature acknowledged in the programme?

Questions you could ask yourself while you observe the class

How will this philosophy of education fit with my family's values and beliefs?

Do I think this style of education will enrich my child's emotional, spiritual and intellectual experiences?

How does Montessori respond to my child's curiosity?

Essential Element

Montessori educators know that children are creative and curious and will use the interests and discoveries of all children to enrich the classroom curriculum.

What this results in ...

The learning environment is prepared with each community of children in mind, and the selection of activities are modified constantly to meet the ever-changing needs, interests and abilities of the children.

Children progress at their own pace and select work that captures their interest and attention while the teacher strives to draw their attention and capture their interest in new challenges.

Individual planning is completed for each child based on ongoing and systematic observations by teachers.

A variety of assessment processes are used to record student development and progress and to share with parents.

Questions you could ask the Montessori centre staff

How do you know when my child is ready for new challenges?

If my child shows a special interest in an area of discovery - how will this be responded to?

How do you change the classroom during the year to respond to the needs of the new children that arrive?

Can you tell me what assessment is used to assess my child's progress and how this will be shared with me?

Montessori Learning Environment (3 - 6)

Questions you could ask yourself while you observe the class

Do you see children using the Montessori materials to explore?

Do you see teachers inviting children to try new activities?

Do you see the teachers standing back and observing the class; making notes to use in planning for each child?

How is the NZ Early Childhood Curriculum Te Whaariki delivered?

Essential Element

The NZ Early Childhood Curriculum Te Whaariki was designed as a descriptive rather than prescriptive curriculum to enable all philosophical approaches to be integrated into Te Whariki. This enables different early childhood services to implement the NZ early childhood curriculum in different ways according to their philosophy.

What this results in ...

Te Whariki is woven into the Montessori curriculum and the curriculum should be one integrated whole of Te Whariki through Montessori as opposed to two separate curricula of Montessori and Te Whariki.

Questions you could ask the Montessori centre staff

How do you integrate Te Whaariki and Montessori as a cohesive whole?

Questions you could ask yourself while you observe the class

Do you see evidence of Te Reo Maori in the classroom - for instance, words in Maori being used both verbally and in written material?

Are there Montessori schools for older children?

Essential Element

Montessori learning environments are offered for primary school children in many areas of NZ. As the number of children entering Montessori primary environments increases, so does the necessity for providing high school environments.

What this results in ...

The centre provides information about the Montessori curriculum and classes for primary and high school aged children.

The centre offers support for transition to state primary school for you and your child.

Questions you could ask the Montessori centre staff

Do you have any information about Montessori primary in our area?

How do you help my child transition to state primary school?

Are there plans to establish a Montessori primary school and/or a secondary school in this area?

Questions you could ask yourself while you observe the class

Would I want my child to continue to experience Montessori when they are older, in the future?

Membership of Montessori Aotearoa New Zealand

Essential Element

The Montessori Aotearoa New Zealand has played a key role in supporting the growth of Montessori in NZ since 1982. MANZ provides high quality Montessori professional development and publications for educators and parents and represents Montessori at national levels.

What this results in ...

The centre is a member of Montessori Aotearoa New Zealand and a membership certificate is on display at the centre.

Information from the national association is on display or available to parents including a monthly newsletter and quarterly magazine.

Teachers attend MANZ professional development and conferences regularly.

Questions you could ask the Montessori centre staff

Does the Montessori centre belong to and support the Montessori Aotearoa New Zealand?

What information will I receive from the national association?

Can I see some issues of the national association's magazine, Montessori Voices?

Montessori Adults (3-6)



What qualifications do Montessori teachers have?

Essential Element

Montessori teachers need specialist Montessori qualifications for the age group they teach, in addition to appropriate NZ early childhood teaching qualifications.

What this results in ...

There is a diversity of Montessori qualifications in New Zealand and Montessori centres decide individually which Montessori qualifications they will accept.

Montessori qualifications can be achieved through distance learning, face-to-face diplomas, and as part of a teaching degree. There are NZ-based courses and many overseas courses.

MANZ acknowledges that Montessori teacher education programmes or training courses can be hard to access throughout New Zealand but recommend Montessori courses that provide face-to-face instruction, especially for Montessori curriculum and materials. Montessori teachers will be better prepared when the face-to-face component of the course increases; the minimum would be a face-to-face component of 80 hours moving through to a fulltime face-to-face course over nine months or more.

Ideally, all staff in the centre will either have a Montessori qualification or be working towards it. At minimum, the lead teacher in the classroom needs to have a Montessori teaching qualification for the age group taught.

Questions you could ask the Montessori centre staff

What qualifications do the teachers hold?

How many Montessori-trained staff are employed in the centre or classroom?

What Montessori training and experience do they have?

What other qualifications do staff have?

Questions you could ask yourself while you observe the class

Does the teacher speak knowledgeably and confidently about Montessori philosophy and practice and can the teacher answer my questions clearly?

Is the teacher implementing Montessori in a way which is consistent with these guidelines?

How many adults should be in a Montessori early childhood classroom?

Essential Element

The Montessori learning community reaches its full potential when the number of adults is kept to the minimum, since the real work of learning belongs to the child.

What this results in ...

There is a minimum of adults present in the Montessori early childhood classroom (in New Zealand there is a state requirement for one adult per 10 early childhood children over two years of age).

Children develop the ability to concentrate and to become absorbed in their chosen activity or work when interruptions by adults or whole group times are kept to a minimum.

Parent involvement will be welcomed for specified times and community activities but the Montessori classroom focuses on the children becoming

Montessori Adults (3-6)

independent, which is only possible when adults are scare!

Questions you could ask the Montessori centre staff

What is the centre's teacher-child ratio?

What do you need for me to do to respect the children's learning space?

How does your adult:child ratio encourage/foster independence?

Questions you could ask yourself while you observe the class

How many adults are in the classroom? What are they doing?

What can I see the Montessori teachers doing to protect the children's concentration?

How do Montessori teachers develop respectful communities of children?

Essential Element

The Montessori educator deliberately models the behaviours and attitudes that she wishes the children to learn.

What this results in ...

When you visit a Montessori class - it should be hard to see or hear the teachers. Look for adults who are engaged with children, who do not intrude on children, who lower themselves to the child's level to communicate and talk in a quiet speaking voice.

Teachers give frequent 'grace and courtesy' lessons to children - gently modelling and showing what behaviour is desirable.

Adults model careful, respectful handling of learning materials and children are encouraged to take care of materials also.

Questions you could ask the Montessori centre staff

What grace and courtesy lessons do you give and what is the purpose of these lessons?

How do you help children to understand the behaviour that is acceptable in the classroom?

How do you manage extreme behaviour events from the children?

Questions you could ask yourself while you observe the class

Are the teachers very obvious in the classroom - or are they calm, quiet and engaged respectfully with the children one on one or in small groups?

Can I see teachers who show that they are enjoying the children?

Is the relationship between the teachers and children warm and interactive?

Why do Montessori teachers spend so much time watching the children?

Essential Element

The Montessori teacher is a trained observer of children.

Teachers use these careful observations and their knowledge of the whole child to guide the child's learning.

What this results in ...

In order for the approach to be truly child centred and child initiated, teachers are constantly observing what the children's interests, strengths and dispositions are.

Montessori teachers are hard to spot in a classroom - they will be quietly working with 1-2 children, presenting new lessons or quietly observing.

Questions you could ask the Montessori centre staff

When you observe my child what kinds of things are you looking for?

How does this support your planning for my child?

Questions you could ask yourself while you observe the class

Do the teachers take time to stand back and observe or are they constantly engaged with children?

What teachers will be in the class with my child each day?

Essential Element

The child needs to experience the same Montessori teachers in the classroom every day.

Montessori Adults (3-6)

What this results in ...

A safe, caring community is built between familiar adults and the children.

Ideally the lead teacher needs to be the same person every day.

Ideally the other teachers in the class will be the same from day to day although this may not be possible when a staff member is training or on professional development.

Questions you could ask the Montessori centre staff

Who are the teachers my child will interact with each day?

How will I know if my child's teacher is going to be absent?

What staff turnover does the centre have?

Questions you could ask yourself while you observe the class

Do the children seem to be familiar and confident with all the adults in the classroom?

How do Montessori teachers keep up to date?

Essential Element

Montessori teachers need professional development to enable them to be reflective practitioners and lifelong learners.

What this results in ...

MANZ suggests teachers should attend 10 to 12 hours of Montessori-focused professional development each year, in addition to other teaching professional development.

Questions you could ask the Montessori centre staff

How do you stay current with what is happening in Montessori and general education in New Zealand and the wider world?

What is the role of parents in Montessori centres?

Essential Element

Montessori early childhood centres - staff, administrators and owners - work in partnership with parents.

What this results in ...

Montessori centres foster a dialogue with parents to promote understanding of Montessori philosophy and values.

There is an orientation process for both the parent and child to the Montessori learning environment.

There are opportunities for parents to be involved in the Montessori community.

There are opportunities for parents to learn about Montessori philosophy and practice.

There are Montessori books, magazines and resources available to borrow.

Regular dialogue with staff and written feedback provides parents with information about their child's learning and experiences.

Montessori centres offer suggestions about what you can do at home to support the work that happens at Montessori.

Questions you could ask the Montessori centre staff

How can I be involved with my children's learning in the Montessori environment?

What support do teachers need?

What kinds of parent information evenings are offered and how will I know when these are being run?

Are there any books and resources I can borrow that will help me understand more about Montessori?

What kind of parent support networks operate in the centre and how will I get to know other parents?

What other opportunities are there for my family to be involved in the Montessori centre?

Can I talk to other parents about their involvement in the centre?

Montessori Adults (3-6)

Questions you could ask yourself while you observe the class

Look at the notice-boards in the centre - what information is there for parents?

What parent community activities are promoted?

What is the vision for Montessori at the centre?

Essential Element

The Montessori centre has a clear vision for how it delivers Montessori education.

What this results in ...

The centre provides written information about its philosophy and vision for its students and ongoing growth.

The centre's operations manual, policies and procedures are available to parents at all times.

Questions you could ask the Montessori centre staff

How can I access the centre's Operation Manual and Education Review Office report?

How does the school promote Montessori to the wider community?

Questions you could ask yourself while you observe the class

Does the vision of the centre seem alive in the daily life of the centre?