

**Childcare Curriculum**

Ballybrack/Killiney Montessori & Afterschool Ltd is designed to offer full teaching in the Montessori method for pre-school children along with opportunities for structured creative and interesting play. Through the prepared environment of the school the children will learn new skills, build their independence, confidence and intellect. Due to the high qualifications of our staff, we can offer an all-round education to our children, taking the best from each method and adapting it to our own needs. We have ten years’ experience in the childcare sector, and this greatly aids us in developing a curriculum that is challenging and stimulating for our children.

We try to work closely with the local national schools and while some of our curriculum does overlap, we work very hard at providing a parallel curriculum so that the children have new challenges when they move on to primary school.

After the child has settled and is becoming independent, learning social skills and group behaviour, the main purpose of our curriculum is to encourage good learning practices and to foster and stimulate the imagination, all in a very happy and enjoyable environment. When the child is nearing the end of their time in Montessori, we will also prepare them for primary school.

To this end, we cover early numbers and alphabet sounds (recognition and formation) and other cultural subjects including nature, history and geography. We believe art is an essential area of the children’s expressions and we cover all aspects of this subject (e.g. painting, modelling, collage etc.). We do much seasonal project work and try to bring all aspects of the curriculum to this. We also provide opportunities for imaginative play, messy play/sensory play and social skills through roleplay and small world play.

During the year we encourage links to our community such as a visit by the local Lollipop lady, Postman, Ambulance service, a junior infant teacher, etc. We also go on trips out into our community from time to time such as our St. Patrick’s Day parade or sponsored walk.

Our outdoor area is of vital importance to us and we have placed a great deal of effort into it to ensure that it becomes an extension of the classroom. We spend at least an hour outside daily and the children can practice their gross motor skills such as climbing, cycling, kicking, digging, etc.

**The Montessori Prepared Environment**

* The equipment in the pre-school environment follows a clear progressive sequence and so of itself furnishes the curriculum of the class, setting objectives in a concrete way before each child and yet providing challenges adapted to his/her natural abilities.
* The prepared environment is adapted to suit the age-group of 2- to 6-year-olds.
* The open shelves offer the child a range of equipment, providing him/her with incentives and opportunities for purposeful movement in key areas of his developmental and cultural needs.
* The equipment range remains basically the same from day to day, but the child is introduced to more and more activities as they develop and build their skills. The order of the equipment provides a framework of security, offering the possibility for the child to repeat activities, which builds concentration and meets the inner need of the child.
* The Montessori activities will encourage each child to develop self-reliance. They do things for themselves and learn to help others, teaching them respect for other people.
* The children will develop their initiative through the gradual increase in their ability to choose their own activity.
* As the equipment is generally self-corrective this allows the child to make independent progress at a pace suited to his abilities and without undue intervention from the teacher.
* The children will do grace and courtesy lessons throughout their day through examples and demonstrations shown by the teacher.

For example, they will learn:

* How to greet a person, how to introduce themselves, how to walk around someone else’s work, how to blow their nose, how to cough, how to walk not run in the class, how to ask to be part of an activity. These lessons support the children’s self-reliance and are an aid to life. They are very enjoyable to partake in.

**Some Montessori Views**

Each child is unique but shares with all other children universally common developmental interests.

The child under six years is gifted with a mind capable of absorbing and learning without effort. It is vital that they be exposed to as many worthwhile areas of learning and culture as possible during this time.

*The Montessori Method applies the fundamental principles of* *nature to the education of the children.*

Children’s periods of readiness to learn should be recognised and utilised to the fullness of their potential.

A child’s most important instrument of learning is movement especially that of the hands.

At all times and particularly in the classroom a child must be given the opportunity for meaningful activity. Through repeated exercises that demand a mental effort a child’s will is strengthened leading to self-discipline and preparing him for intellectual achievement.

The Montessori Teacher prepares the classroom environment. It must be very orderly and homely rather than academic. The teacher must observe the children closely in order to understand their stage of development so they she can demonstrate the appropriate activities.

The liberty of the child in the prepared environment is one of the fundamental principles of the Montessori Method. It is a freedom with limits. Once the child has been shown activities they are then free to choose what they want to work with. The small ones in the beginning are less free as they must be shown everything and helped a great deal. The activities encourage movement about the classroom. The freedom to choose one’s own work quickly leads to order, harmony, self-development and therefore to self-discipline.

At Ballybrack Killiney Montessori & Afterschool Ltd we extend children's learning by using a 'planning in the moment' or emergent curriculum approach.  Planning in the moment is all about seizing the moment for children to progress. It is based on what the children are already deeply involved in. This way of planning relies on skilful practitioners using quality interactions to draw out the children’s knowledge and build on it there and then (in the moment). This means that the practitioners have used skills to observe what the child is doing and needs to do next, assessed the teachable moment from the child’s perspective and are skilled enough to know when to intervene and when to stand back and observe. Planning in the moment is all about capturing the moment of engagement and running with it to make sure the children progress. We link everything that we do to Aistear to ensure that all goals and aims are being met.

This way of working means that all written planning is retrospective -there is little to no forward planning as the adults follow the interests of the children. Each practitioner records what they have done to help the children progress on focus child sheets, parent sheets and group record sheets. This ensures that teaching is monitored, and any observations reflected upon regularly.

A pioneer of 'planning in the moment' is Anna Ephgrave, who explains why this approach is so effective: “Babies and young children are experiencing and learning in the here and now, not storing up their questions until tomorrow or next week. It is in that moment of curiosity, puzzlement, effort, or interest – the ‘teachable moment’ – that the skilful adult makes a difference. By using this cycle on a moment-by-moment basis, the adult will be always alert to individual children (observation), always thinking about what it tells us about the child’s thinking (assessment), and always ready to respond by using appropriate strategies at the right moment to support children’s well-being and learning (planning for the next moment)."