

Montessori primary units in New Zealand

There are 15 Montessori Primary Units in New Zealand ranging in size from approximately 20 students in one class to over 90 in three others. There are currently no units situated in the South Island, there have been in the past and probably will be in the future. Currently the units are located in the areas noted in figure 2.

Montessori units in primary school are far more accessible and easier to start than private schools (of which there are four for 6-12-year olds) and integrated schools (of which there is 1). The first due to cost and premises, the second due to the regulations around starting an integrated school. As a result, the growth in Montessori Primary in New Zealand has been within the state school system.

Montessori in Primary Schools started in 1992 with the establishment of a unit at Otari School in Wellington. Since then it has gone from strength to strength as more and more parents see the opportunity to have their child continue on from a successful Montessori preschool experience.

In almost all cases the units have started because a groundswell of parental support. These parents, most of whom have had children in Montessori preschool, wish to extend their child's positive preschool experience and have them continue in Montessori education in their primary years. The parents form a trust or group to see what is possible.

The groups are usually given aid by successful units around the country (see figure 2). The Montessori Association of New Zealand (MANZ) and Ministry of Education (MoE) joint guidelines for the establishment of a unit in a NZ State Primary School is also a useful tool (see appendix). Once the school has its strategy, it looks for a host school and works to establish a Memorandum of Understanding that will allow the unit to be sited there. Once this is done it continues to support the establishment of the unit through providing materials, students and at times, access to trained Guides (though the trust fully understands that all hiring decisions are at the discretion of the school and its management). The group then continue to support both the unit and the school as a whole to ensure the continued success.

The times a unit comes into difficulty can be when a new principal takes over the school who is not necessarily supportive or confident in Montessori, or when new Guides cannot be found. Many schools have successfully overcome these obstacles though and continue to thrive and succeed. The basis to this success can often be found in a carefully thought out Memorandum of Understanding and a transparent process for operating the unit.

One successful way of running the unit has been through the establishment of a sub-committee of the board tasked with the day to day management of the unit, including such things as enrolments (often proposed by the trust who vet them to meet an agreed criteria), space, timetabling, duty, interruptions etc. This sub-committee can be composed of the principal, another member of senior staff, a delegate from the board, the Guide and a member of the trust. The structure with up to three members of the school community makes it clear that the running of the unit sits squarely with the principal, as does the running of the entire school, but regular meetings and a clear structure and format should mean no surprises and a smooth and well-functioning unit.

| Region | Primary School |
|---------------|---------------------|
| Auckland | Matakana School |
| | Orakei School |
| | Howick School |
| | Glendowie School |
| | Huapai School |
| Bay of Plenty | Arataki School |
| | Bellevue School |
| | Malfroy School |
| Hawkes Bay | Port Ahuriri School |
| Taranaki | Motorua School |
| Wairarapa | Southend School |
| Kapiti | Kapiti School |
| Wellington | Otari School |
| | Berhampore School |
| | Tawa School |

Figure 2

