

MONTESSORI UNDER THE MICROSCOPE AT NEWBERRY HOUSE



Multi-age classes, freedom, sports and university acceptance were just some of the pressing topics that principal Alistair Green addressed to prospective parents and students at Newberry House Montessori School in Somerset West.

"There are a myriad jobs today that didn't exist five years ago, with so many more to come within the next few years. The question is, how do we prepare tomorrow's generation today?" asked Green. "What if I told you that one of the best ways to prepare our children for tomorrow lies in an educational model that is 110 years old."

Green was referring to Maria Montessori developing a revolutionary new type of education model over a century ago which, instead of having children sitting down and listening to an adult telling them what to learn, flipped the system on its head and followed the child.

"Following the child does not mean raising self-centred, narcissistic young people who think that the world revolves around them," said Green.

"Montessori classrooms encourage self-directed learning and discovery through specially designed learning materials."

One of the concerns parents have about Montessori is the perception of too much freedom. "Children learn best through self-directed learning, so Montessori children are given more freedom of choice than in traditional settings," said Green. "But Montessori schools also have structure, with specific materials and activities where teachers prepare the learning environment and provide the necessary structure, support and feedback."

One of the unique characteristics of a Montessori classroom that struck visitors is the multi-age classrooms, which consist of three-year age ranges.

"Children learn to collaborate with learners older and younger than themselves and to respect each other's strengths, ideas and points of view," explained Green. "Older children grow in confidence by acting as mentors, and younger children are very receptive to learning from their older peers."

Green also shared about the sports programme on offer at Newberry House: "We are very grateful to have been selected as one of 6 schools worldwide to pilot the first ever Montessori Sports programme, which forms part of our curriculum".

The programme is being developed in collaboration with Cruyff Football (based in the Netherlands). "A common approach shared by Montessori and Cruyff is that of encouraging intrinsic motivation, where individuals improve and become their best through their love and enjoyment of the activity (be it learning or movement) rather than mainly through external rewards and pressures."

Extracurricular sports on offer at Newberry House include team sports such as soccer and netball, and lifestyle sports such as mountain biking, surfing and trail running.

Tackling concerns about tertiary studies, Green said Newberry House is an accredited Cambridge International Assessment Centre: "Our High School students follow the Cambridge curriculum, accepted by top universities worldwide. There is a great synergy between Montessori and Cambridge, especially with regards to active learning and independent thinking," he said.

"In the current knowledge economy, the focus of education needs to shift from acquisition of information to application: problem-solving, collaboration, creativity and application of concepts in various contexts. We don't teach what to think; we teach how to think."

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