

ST. CHRISTOPHER'S MONTESSORI SCHOOL

SPECIAL NEEDS POLICY

POLICY CONTEXT/GUIDING PRINCIPLES e.g., for handbook or website)

The following St Christopher's Special Needs Policy addresses the needs of both our pre-kindergarten and our Kindergarten students. Most of our students begin attending our school during their pre-kindergarten year (age 3 or 4). It must be noted that any policies outlined here will be usurped by the Ministry's Special Education Services, Manual of Policies, Procedures and Guidelines (Section 5.01a) with regards to our kindergarten students – see link below.

https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/education/administration/kindergarten-to-grade-12/inclusive/special_ed_policy_manual.pdf

- I. St Christopher's Montessori school ("the school") recognizes diversity of children and their needs. The school strives to provide an inclusive environment that meets the needs of all children. Providing an optimal learning environment requires:
 - a. open communication between parents, teachers, and the Principal,
 - b. predetermined and transparent processes for determining needs and supports,
 - c. advanced planning for children to ensure those enrolling for multiple years (and into their kindergarten year) are supported for the duration of their enrolment.
 - d. clear policy regarding admission of children with known needs and the continued enrolment of children who is needs cannot be accommodated.
 - e. guiding policy governing the allocation of extra support fund resources
- II. The school has an Extra Support Policy (below) that guides the provision of supports for children with additional learning and behavioural needs and outlines the school's approach to items *ae* above.
- III. While the intention of the policy is to ensure the needs of children are met, the school must make decisions in the context of the needs of the school as a whole and in recognition of fiscal constraints.
- IV. The school believes early intervention (including identification of needs and the provision of supports) is key to ensuring the best possible opportunity is provided for children to reach their individual potential.
- V. Implementation of the policy is an operation issue and is at the discretion of the Principal working in consultation with the teaching team.

ST. CHRISTOPHER'S MONTESSORI SCHOOL

EXTRA SUPPORT POLICY

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POLICY PURPOSE:

The purpose of the Extra Support Policy is to guide provision of supports for children with additional learning and behavioural needs and outlines the school's approach to:

- I. ensuring open communication between parents, teachers, and the Principal regarding a child's extra support needs.
- II. providing a predetermined and transparent process for determining needs and supports.
- III. advanced planning for children to ensure those enrolling for multiple years (and into their kindergarten year) are supported for the duration of their enrolment.
- IV. the admission of children with known needs and continued enrolment of children whose needs cannot be accommodated.
- V. the allocation of extra support fund resources.

Part 1: Open Communication between Parents, Teachers, and the Principal:

- I. The school recognizes that for a parent, learning that their child has additional learning or behavioural needs can be an emotional and challenging time. As such, the school will make every effort to support parents by communicating about processes, observations and needs in a noticeably clear and respectful manner.

The school may take the following steps to meet this objective **note: these are examples:**

- Appointing a 'key contact' for the parent to ensure observations/concerns are communicated consistently to parents regarding processes (e.g., next steps, progress updates, etc.).
 - Providing to parents a visual depiction of next steps and ways the parent could support processes.
 - Sharing resources with parents (e.g., contact information for speech language pathologists in area), connecting them with other community supports.
 - Inviting weekly summary email correspondence with parents expressing significant concern about child.
- II. The school recognizes that collaborative planning is key to ensuring the best outcomes for children, particularly children with extra support needs.

The school will take the following steps to meet this objective **note: these are example:**

- The school may wish to establish 'standard' procedures/templates that would guide collaborative planning and decision making – e.g., template for student observations to ensure a consistent approach is used across the school.
 - Establishing/maintaining a school-based teacher-led team tasked with supporting implementation of this policy.
 - Calendarizing when decisions are made regarding sharing observations/concern amongst school-based team and making decisions about extra support funds.
- III. Parents will share information relevant to their child's learning and developmental needs that are relevant in the context of the school environment. This includes:
 - Sharing information about any previous support provided by Speech Language Pathologists, Occupational Therapists, Behavioural Interventionists, Physical Therapists, other professionals.
 - Sharing personal observations, they feel are relevant to the school environment.

Part 2: Predetermined and Transparent Processes for Determining Needs (pre-Kindergarten)

- I. The school will use a consistent and transparent process when identifying and determining extra support needs for children (in years 1 and 2 of the Montessori program):

II. This process will be as follows (**note: the process outlined may be augmented but is intended to outline an ideal/best practice process as described by the teaching staff and Principal**):

i. OBSERVATIONS AND DOCUMENTATION:

- i. Teacher(s) will document observations of behaviour/learning need (preferably in a consistent way).
- ii. Teachers and school-based team will meet to discuss child – their observations and needs.

ii. SHARING INFORMATION WITH PARENTS:

i. Parents will be asked by the school to engage in discussion of teacher observations.

ii. Parents will be invited to participate in classroom-based observation and debriefing.

iii. ENGAGING PROFESSIONALS:

i. The school, via the Principal, will indicate to the parent that the school would like to seek the advice of professionals via the Supported Child Development Programⁱ (for children in year 1 and 2 only, or other early intervention therapy professionals).

ii. At this time, the school will indicate to the parent **that if consent is provided by the parent/guardian**, the school will contact the Supported Child Development Program on their behalf. **If consent is not provided the school will request the parent contact the program independently.**

iii. If the parent provides consent to the school, the Principal will ensure paperwork and referral to the Supported Child Development program is expedited to ensure optimal service response time.

iv. Should the parent wish to engage third party professionals independently (e.g., engage a speech language pathologist via the Health Unit for an independent speech assessment), **the parent MUST share findings and updates with the school to ensure teachers have access to information needed to adequately plan for the needs of the student.**

iv. SERVICE DELIVERY/PROVISION OF SUPPORTS:

- i. Once Supported Child Development Program has been engaged and it is determined the level of support (and where applicable, the funding to be allocated to the school to provide these supports – e.g., an assistant), the school

will set up regular meetings with parents to share next steps and progress updates.

- v. Should the Supported Child Development Program deem a child ineligible for receiving support (e.g., aid or supportive equipment, ongoing professional consultation services), the school will make its best efforts to accommodate the needs of the child, subject to financial limitations. In this case, the school will exhaust all other avenues to ensure any provincially funded supports are accessed (e.g., requesting reassessment by Supported Child Development).

(see section re: Advanced Planning for Children transitioning to kindergarten)

Part 3: Admission of children with known needs and continued enrolment of children who is needs cannot be accommodated.

I. Admission of children with known extra support needs:

- i. The school will not refuse the admission of an applicant with an extra support need if accommodation of that need does not provide undue hardship (financial or other) for the school.
- ii. The school will work with parents and engage the Supported Child Development program where appropriate, to determine if a child's (applicant) needs can be adequately accommodated in the school context.

II. The school can de-register a student under the Extra Support Policy in the following circumstances:

- i. If the student's needs surpass funding available to accommodate those needs:

The school can, at the discretion of the Principal, request the withdrawal of the student IF, and only IF, that student's behaviour or extra support needs cause undue hardship for teaching staff or other students.

- ii. Parent refusal to access third party professionals:

If a parent does not consent to engaging third party professionals independently or via the school within 1 month of meeting with the Principal regarding the school's observations re: extra support needs (as per Part 2: section II, v.), the school can, at the discretion of the principal, request the withdrawal of the student IF, and only IF, that student's behaviour or extra support needs cause undue hardship for teaching staff or other students. Examples of this include:

Violent or threatening behaviour towards other children, teaching staff or self harm of the student is exhibited, which in the opinion of the school requires fulltime, one-to-one supervision.

- III. At no time is the decision to ask a parent to withdraw a child from the school related to extra support needs (including patterns of disruptive behaviour) a decision of the Board. This is an operational decision that will be made by the Principal after careful consultation (which will be systematically documented) with the teaching staff and only after all other options to accommodate a behaviour or need have been exhausted.
- IV. Documentation requirements will vary on a case-by-case basis. However, it is recommended that prior to any decision requesting the withdrawal of a student, the school will have prepared:
 - teacher records outlining patterns of behaviour or need and the impact of these on the Montessori classroom (other students, teacher's time, etc.).
 - minutes or key outcomes of school-based team meetings to discuss the extra support needs of a student.
 - outcomes of past meetings with parents; and,
 - documented efforts to accommodate the student's needs within the classroom.

Part 4: Advanced Planning for Children Enrolling for multiple years (and into their kindergarten year)

CONTEXT: *All policies previously mentioned in this document regarding open communication, transparent processes, and requesting the de-registration of a student are to be maintained through the kindergarten transition. It is worth noting however, that this transition point (pre-kindergarten into kindergarten) marks an important shift for families and for the school in the provision of additional supports.*

For many children supported during the 1st and 2nd years at the school via the Supported Child Development Program (funded via Ministry of Children and Family Development), once enrolled in their kindergarten year, these children will no longer have access to this program and the school will no longer have access to the funding and supports provided via the Supported Child Development Program.

Kindergarten-enrolled children are under the jurisdiction/responsibility of the Ministry of Education where 'extra supports' are provided through quite different funding streams and models. The school may find itself ineligible for additional funding and support for many children who are receiving supports in their 1st and 2nd years. For this reason, transition planning and clear guidelines regarding the resourcing of supports for kindergarten aged children is required:

- I. For children enrolled in the school and receiving extra learning or behaviour supports (in year 2 of the 3-year Montessori program), the school will meet with parents, prior to the end of their

existing year and at the earliest appropriate time, **to begin planning for the kindergarten transition (including requesting a formal psycho-educational assessment, discussion of school's financial limitations in accommodating needs; options for a half-day kindergarten program, etc.)**

- II. Requesting and Paying for a Formal Psycho-Educational Assessment (conducted by a physician or educational psychologist):
 - a. The school retains the right to request a formal psychological education assessment be conducted for a child that demonstrates additional learning supports and needs IF that child is enrolled in or registered for their Kindergarten year.
 - b. The school will strongly encourage parents to advocate via the Supported Child Development program consultant, early intervention therapists (e.g., speech language pathologist), or the medical system, to have a formal psycho- educational assessment PRIOR to their kindergarten year.
 - c. The cost of this assessment will be covered by the parents. This is agreed to in writing at the time of **initial** registration in the school.
 - d. The school will only make this request (for a formal educational assessment) in circumstances where there is a clear need for additional information regarding the learning or behaviour needs of the child beyond what is already known about his/her needs and/or it is deemed that a formal assessment could yield a 'diagnoses or designation aligned with additional funding under the special needs grant provided by the Ministry of Educationⁱⁱ. This determination will be made by the Principal in collaboration with teachers, support professionals currently servicing the child, and parents. In all cases, the best interests of the child are central to the decision to proceed with requesting a formal psycho-educational assessment.

Half-Day Kindergarten Program:

- III. The school retains the right to limit a kindergarten child's program to a half-day in cases where the child's extra support needs cannot be accommodated within the school budget for a full-day program.
- IV. Should this half-day program be requested/determined, it will be done by the Principal after consultation with teaching staff. This decision will be discussed with the parents prior to September of the kindergarten year.

Part 5: Contribution to, and Allocation of, the *Extra Support Needs Fund* Budget:

- I. **The school will set aside 7%** of the projected independent school grant each year through the regular budgeting process (budgeting process done in the winter/spring in advance of the school year) for the purposes of addressing extra support needs for **kindergarten children** in the coming year. This funding will be referred to as the *Extra Support Needs Fund ('The Fund')*.

- II. The Principal will meet with staff early in the academic year, and on an ongoing basis to determine the children and activities to be supported with *the Fund*, recognizing the policy statements below. The Principal retains the discretion to allocate the fund in accordance with the guiding principles of this policy.
 - i. Children eligible to receive additional supports under *the Fund* do NOT require a 'diagnoses. Allocation of resources is based on functional needs assessments in the context of the Montessori classroom as determined by the teaching staff and ultimately decided upon by the Principal.
 - ii. Children who have a formal diagnosis that meets Category A-Hⁱⁱⁱ requirements as laid out in the special needs manual of the Ministry of Education can be supported with *the Fund*; however, it is recognized that the school will receive additional supplementary funds from the Ministry of Education to provide targeted supports for these children in accordance with their Individualized Education Plan. *The Fund* should therefore focus primarily on those children that do not fall in these categories (Categories A-H).
 - iii. *The Fund* can be used, at the discretion of the Principal and in collaboration with teachers, on any resource or support deemed necessary to meet the child's needs or to assist the school in meeting those needs. Expenditures could include, but are not limited to:
 - a. Part-time assistants to support a student (s) during art/music or partial days.
 - b. Relief time for teachers to observe students or fulfill administrative duties related to supporting the child (e.g., updating required documentation, meeting with parents)
 - c. Purchasing resources and equipment to support a child (e.g., full height desks, weighted vest)
 - d. Other resource or support to support a student.
 - iv. Should the school determine during the school year that there are no student-specific extra support needs to be accommodated, the school may, at the discretion of the Principal, use the fund to resource activities that support the Guiding Principles of this policy, supporting the overall capacity of the school and staff to support children with additional support needs. These activities could include, but are not limited to:
 - a. Professional development related to supporting children with extra support needs.
 - b. Buying resources and equipment to support existing and future children (**of any age, in other words, not only to support kindergarten children**) with attention, behaviour, or learning needs (e.g., full height desks, weighted vest)

- c. Setting aside the annual contribution in *the Fund* to a special account in anticipation of future special needs requirements (e.g., planning for a high needs child currently in 1st year).
- v. The fund will NOT be reallocated to address other funding shortfalls (e.g., to address a school deficit).
- vi. At the completion of each school year, the Principal will present a final report to the Board outlining how the fund was allocated.

Part 6: Allocation of Extra Support Needs Fund for multiple children and carrying over funds in anticipation of needs.

- I. The Principal will meet with staff early in the academic year, and on an ongoing basis to determine the needs of all kindergarten student eligible to receive supports under the Extra Support Needs Fund (above).
- II. The school does not employ a 'first-come, first-served' policy related to the allocation of Extra Support Needs Funds. In other words, a child enrolled for 3 years at the school does not have increased eligibility for the fund over a student enrolled for only 2 years.
- III. Children enrolled in the same calendar year, and with equal needs (note: not necessarily equal diagnosis or designation) are eligible for equivalent support. Should the Extra Support Needs Fund be inadequate to meet those needs, the school will not 'choose' one student to support over another student. In these circumstances, the school will enact other policy levers outlined in this document for both families (e.g., half-day kindergarten program option, request for withdrawal of student, etc.).
- IV. The school can carry forward Extra Support Needs Funds in anticipation of a year 1 or year 2 student attending kindergarten in the future. The school is cautioned from doing this as it may set precedent for the level of support the school can provide individual students.

Part 7: Amending the Extra Support Policy:

1. The Principal, after consultation with the teaching team, may propose amendments to the Extra Support Policy for the Board to approve.
2. Once approved by the Board, implementation of the policy amendments become an operation issue and at the discretion of the Principal.

ⁱ Broadly, the provincial government supports the inclusion of children with special needs via the Supported Child Development Program (SCD). This provincial program is contracted out to agencies across British Columbia. The Queen Alexandra Centre for Children's Health and the Victoria Native Friendship Centre administer the SCD program for all lower Vancouver Island.

Supported Child Development (SCD) agencies provide a range of consulting and support services to children, families, and childcare centres so that children with extra support needs can participate in fully inclusive childcare settings. Referral to the agency can be done by the parent or the preschool provider (with the parent's consent).

To qualify for funding and support under the SCD program a child with developmental and behavioral challenge must have a Support Guide completed by an SCD consultant. The information gathered during the Support Guide process helps to guide the SCD consultant's clinical decision regarding the level of SCDP services.

The Support Guide may include:

- SCD consultant's observations of the child in the childcare setting,
- assessments and/or reports of other health care professionals and community partners, and
- the efforts and strategies used by the childcare staff to promote inclusion.

Using the Support Guide, the SCD consultant will decide on the level of support to be provided to the preschool:

- consultant only support:

- the provision of on-site training with observations, suggestions, and discussion around a family's goals for a child's development and care.
organizing of team meetings with therapists and other VIHA and community professionals
- off-site training in the form of workshops, information sessions, mentoring opportunities.
- networking opportunities for families and/or childcare providers.
- guidance on child development opportunities including daycare options as well as recreation centres or playgroups.
- navigating community partners through the local childcare system.,
- consultant support in combination with extra staffing support in licensed childcare settings:
 - enhances staffing levels to help ensure the effective inclusion of all the children in the childcare setting.
 - are considered shared and are in addition to adult-to-child ratios specified by VIHA Licensing regulations. SCDP does not fund "one-to-one" support.
 - promotes teamwork by helping all staff to take responsibility and participate in modifications or adaptations to the environment and programming.
 - may only complement on-site therapeutic interventions with prior approval by the SCD consultant.

ii The provincial government (via the Ministry of Education) provides funding to independent schools to support the inclusion of children with special needs via the independent schools grant and/or supplementary grants. This funding is provided based on the formal diagnosis of a child and the child's identified special need. Diagnosis is conducted by a medical physician or an educational psychologist and must be made in accordance with the Diagnostic Skills Manual IV (note DSM V being phased in).

SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICES: A MANUAL OF POLICIES, PROCEDURES AND GUIDELINES

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- Special education funding for the categories/diagnoses described below is included in the regular operational grants issued to independent schools. **Therefore, the following categories do not qualify for supplementary special education funding or grants:**
 - English Language Learning (ELL) ○ ADD and ADHD (Attention Deficit Disorder or Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder) ○ Learning Assistance.
Speech and Language Services ○ Learning Disabilities, including Severe Learning Disabilities (SLD) ○ Mild Intellectual Disabilities (Mild Mental Handicap)
 - Giftedness
- Independent schools are eligible for additional funding to support students with the following needs/diagnoses via supplementary grants (Per-student special education funding levels and categories)
 - Level 1 (\$36,600 per FTE)
 - Category A: Physically dependent
 - Category B: Deaf/Blind
 - Level 2 (\$18,300 per FTE)
 - Category C: Moderate to Profound Intellectual Disability
 - Category D: Physical Disability or Chronic Health Impairment
 - Category E: Visual Impairment
 - Category F: Deaf or Hard of Hearing
 - Category G: Autism Spectrum Disorder
 - Level 3 (\$9,200 per FTE)
 - Category H: Intensive Behaviour Intervention or Serious Mental Illness

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