



**Maara House**  
for the love of learning

## PARENT HANDBOOK

Version: February 2017

This is information we feel you need to know about the school.  
Please feedback to us things that are unclear.  
Please also see APPENDIX A – Parent FAQ's

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2016 / 496676 / 07  
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# 1. GENERAL INFORMATION

## THE MAARA HOUSE TEAM

School Management: Taryn Solomons and Lauren Davis

Head of Learning: June O'Neill

Head of Sport & Teacher support: Justin

## INTRODUCTION:

Maara House is a Reggio Emilia inspired Primary School in the Cape Town City Bowl.

We provide a holistic and sustainable education that will grow the whole child with creativity woven into all aspects of learning.

Our focus is on emotional intelligence, academic learning, self-confidence, resilience, community awareness and values.

## We aim to develop the following 8 CORE COMPETENCIES:

- **Collaboration** – the ability to work constructively with others
- **Compassion** – the ability to empathise with others and to act accordingly
- **Composure** – the ability to connect with the inner life of feelings and to develop a sense of personal harmony and balance
- **Curiosity** – the ability to ask questions and explore how the world works
- **Creativity** – the ability to generate new ideas and to apply them in practice
- **Critical analysis** – the ability to analyse information and ideas and to form reasoned arguments and judgements
- **Communication** – the ability to express thoughts and feelings clearly and confidently in a range of media and forms
- **Citizenship** – the ability to engage constructively with society and to participate in the processes that sustain it

(Ken Robinson)

**Why 'Maara House'** - meanings of 'Maara': in Igbo (native Nigerian language) it means conscious and aware. In other languages, it means 'of the sea'; 'garden'; of many different stripes'.

## MAARA HOUSE PURPOSE AND VALUES

Our purpose:

**Building conscious, active global citizens**

Our values

### Kindness:

- Listen to each other
- Care for ourselves and each other
- Patient with ourselves and each other
- We help each other

### Partnership

- Everyone matters
- We are all different and that is ok
- We work together
- The 3 way partnership – child, adult and environment

### **Accountability**

- Taking responsibility for myself and my things
- Mistakes are allowed – own up so we can make a plan and learn from it
- What was my contribution?
- Speak up when unhappy
- Ask for help

### **Always curious**

- Always wanting to be interested and to learn
- Consider other views / ways of seeing things (what am I not seeing? How could I see this differently)

### **Appreciation**

- Be thankful for what we have
- Look for opportunities to appreciate at all times

## **MAARA HOUSE PHILOSOPHY**

Our aim is to find the right way to interact with your child and assist them to interact with the world around them. We are trying to make a better world so how our children relate to the world and understand it is critical.

Our current education system operates from the belief that the child is an empty vessel that the teacher needs to fill with knowledge. Sitting for most of the day, children are the passive recipients of our ideas of knowledge – they don't take part in constructing the answers. Schools teach the history of facts rather than the history of ideas. Current schooling 're-presents' the world to our children in the way they believe is meaningful predominantly using worksheets and homework to reinforce knowledge. Children become disengaged from the learning process and often feeling and thinking is prescribed too.

Our core learning philosophy is based on the Reggio Emilia way. The Reggio inspired way of teaching sees the child as rich, resilient and resourceful and always in relationship with his/her environment. The teacher is a patient observer and moderator, with the ability to step back and allow discussion and discovery.

We believe the child is an important resource and simply needs the space to make sense of things through experiential activities. Children develop their own strategies to figure things out and this allows for differences in children to be valued. Children begin to understand that what we can figure out together is different to what we can figure out alone. Relationships and the co-construction of knowledge is key. The child is a meaningful contributor to the learning.

We believe that the aim of education is to "enable children to understand the world around them and the talents within them so that they can become fulfilled individuals and active, compassionate citizens". (Sir Ken Robinson).

The world itself is part of the learning and knowledge making. The real world and the environment are the third teacher with the teacher and child as the other members of this triad.

We work with the CAPS curriculum in a different way. So **what** is being taught is aligned to government/mainstream school expectations. Your child will be assessed and have relevant reports at the end of each year to ensure they can apply to any other schools. The difference is **how** the curriculum and knowledge is imparted and taught. Our way of teaching will promote enquiry with the children offering the themes and ideas. We want to create an environment where children will want to and be able to learn.

We believe that foundation phase education needs to enable children to:

- engage with the world within them as well as the world around them
- understand and appreciate their own cultures and to respect the diversity of others
- become active and compassionate citizens

## **OUR AIMS AND VALUES:**

- Awareness and trust in the potential of each child
- Harness the child's natural learning ability and curiosity
- Open for new experiences every day
- Process oriented learning
- Creativity woven into all aspects of learning
- The topics are all around us in our everyday lives
- Education as a democratic and common responsibility
- Children have the right to imagine
- Nothing without Joy
- Multiply joy, experiences and knowledge through the collective
- Subjects are interconnected not isolated and based on emergent themes
- Start from the heart and the practical every day

## **WHAT MAKES US DIFFERENT:**

- Recognising that intelligence is diverse and multifaceted
- Enabling children to pursue their particular strengths and interests
- Adapting the schedule to the different rates at which children learn with a dynamic curriculum that can accommodate differences
- The quality of the relationship between the teacher and the child is paramount
- Assessing children in ways that support their personal progress and achievement
- Child:teacher ratio
- Our view of children and learning
- Owners profile – Clinical & Industrial psychologists
- Intramurals & Weekly field trips
- Multi-aging
- EQ curriculum - focus on developing the 8 core competencies
- Mindfulness
- Sports, fitness, nutrition as part of curriculum
- Psychologist and Integrative Learning Therapist consultations
- Nature/outdoors wherever possible (using Cape Town as the 3rd teacher)
- Shift away from traditional principal role to Head of learning and School managers
- Parent development support programme
- Teacher development and support
- Community projects

## **TERM DATES**

The school keeps the basic term dates of the Western Cape Government schools. Please note that in most terms we start a day later to allow for the MAARA House staff's projection planning meeting at the beginning of the term.

## **SCHOOL HOURS**

School Starting Times:

- Social integration: Arrival between 8:00 & 8:20am. Parents can stay for these 20 mins.
- Class starts promptly at 8:30am

School Ending times @ 13:30

Aftercare until 14:30 (this may be provided until 15.30 at a later stage and as demand requires)

The teachers will be available to speak to parents during **arrival** time from 8 – 8.20am each day. This space is intended for quick updates and check-ins. If you need a more in-depth discussion, please let the teacher know and an appointment can be set up that would be convenient for both the staff member and parent. Please also be aware that there are children and other parents around during social integration who may be impacted by a sharing that would be more appropriate to share one-on-one.

Please note that **social integration** time is a very important part of the school curriculum.

If children are not collected by 13:30 they are automatically sent into the afternoon program (aftercare) and you will be billed for this time.

In the case of an emergency, or change of arrangement with the collection of your child, please contact the teachers.

#### Morning drop-off time

The gate opens at 07h45 for children who are dropped off early. Please do take cognizance of the fact that official supervision by a dedicated staff member starts at 08h00 so this is done at parents' own responsibility.

## **2. ADMIN**

### **ABSENCE/HOLIDAYS:**

We kindly request that you notify the school when your child is absent, especially if they have an infectious disease. This is important for our medical records and registers. For holidays, we are not averse to you going away during term time. Often these times are very valuable and fondly remembered. For this to work smoothly, please advise us in writing so we can advise and support this experience, or if we feel it would have a negative impact on your child we will discuss this with you.

### **UPDATE FORMS**

Having the correct contact information about you and your child is essential for us to ensure safety and effective communication. Please ensure you update us of any changes in your or your child's details.

### **NOTICE PERIOD ON LEAVING (NB Information)**

**One full school term's notice of intention to withdraw** a student from the school must be given to either Taryn or Lauren by the last day of the preceding school term. Should the student be withdrawn during a term, fees for the balance of that term and a term's notice are due. Parents are liable for full compulsory fees during the term's notice.

### **LOST PROPERTY**

Lost possessions are collected daily and placed in the lost property box. At the end of each term lost property will be displayed.

### **UNIFORMS**

Children are required to wear the MAARA HOUSE branded golf shirts (grey or white) for school days and the white MAARA HOUSE t-shirt for sport activities. They will also be required to wear MAARA HOUSE branded caps for all outdoor activities (best to leave caps at school in the child's locker/bag) and MAARA HOUSE branded hooded sweatshirts. The children are free to decide what bottoms and shoes they wish to wear. A pair of closed sports takkies will be required to be at school every day for outside time and unplanned outings. Please ensure that if your child comes to school in sandals or barefoot, that there is a pair of closed sports shoes in his/her bag or locker.

## **3. FINANCE AND FEE STRUCTURE**

### **BANKING DETAILS**

Maara House (pty) Ltd  
Account number: 62660449656  
Bank: FNB  
Branch code: 201-511 (Gardens)

## **ADMINISTRATION AND REGISTRATION**

A nominal administration fee is required on submission of the enrollment form

Upon acceptance, a registration fee is required in order to secure your child's place at MAARA HOUSE.

## **DEVELOPMENT FUND**

School fees cover the day-to-day running costs of the school such as salaries, electricity, rent, water, maintenance, security, cleaning, etc. Development fees are used to upgrade facilities and resources needed at the school such as equipment, teaching aids, playgrounds, computers, books and staff training - in essence "developing" and improving long term school resources/facilities. This amount is payable either in one or two installments. The full fee can be paid in January or one half in January and the second half in August each year.

## **FEES**

School fees are due on the 1st day of each month. Our school fees are payable over 12 months and are to be paid electronically or deposited at the bank. In the event of late payments the school follows a "late fee process". Interest will be charged at 2% above prime.

## **PROCESS (LATE) FEE PAYMENTS, INVOICING AND STATEMENTS**

A late fee payments process has been put in place to enable us to keep up our cash flow and be able to meet our payment commitments such as salary payments.

Invoicing will be as follows:

Aftercare will be invoiced from the 15<sup>th</sup> to the 15<sup>th</sup> of each month. The aftercare invoice will be sent out with the school fee invoice on or around the 20<sup>th</sup> of each month. All fees are payable by the 1<sup>st</sup> of the month.

Should it become evident that fees have not been received by the 1<sup>st</sup> of the month, the bursar will send a reminder on the 3<sup>rd</sup> working day of that month with a statement and a note informing that interest on late accounts will be charged from the 7<sup>th</sup> working day of that month.

If payment has not been received by the 10<sup>th</sup> of that month School Management will be informed and we will then engage the person responsible for the payment of school fees. If payment has not been received by the 20<sup>th</sup> of that month the child will not be allowed to attend school until all outstanding fees have been paid.

Our door is always open and you are encouraged to come and engage in a conversation with either Taryn or Lauren the moment you become aware that you might have difficulty with school fee payment. This way we can be part of the solution and not have to use the route as stated above.

## **STATIONERY**

A stationery list will be circulated to parents at the end of each year. Parents are to indicate which items (if any) they would like to be purchased by MAARA HOUSE and the required amount is to be deposited into the MAARA HOUSE bank account by the requested due date.

Should you decide to purchase your own stationery, please bring it with you on the first day of school and the teachers will keep it on behalf of the child to be distributed as required throughout the year.

A separate stationery fee is charged per term. This stationery fee covers the collective stationery that will be used by all children in the classroom. The Reggio Emilia approach uses creativity as a core teaching methodology and as such the art and other related material requirements are extensive.

## **4. SAFETY**

### **FOOD ALLERGY POLICY**

When a student has a life-threatening food allergy the school will put measures in place to avoid the life-threatening situation. See the paragraph on **FOOD AND SNACK TIMES** for more information.

## **COLLECTING CHILDREN**

Children will need to be collected by a responsible adult. The school will not allow a child to go home with another person besides their parents unless the school has been informed (by their parent). This can be done by notifying the teachers in the morning or via cellphone message during the day should an alternative arrangement be made. The messages will be checked regularly to ensure we are up to date.

## **FIRST AID & MEDICINE BOX**

Teachers are trained in First Aid and an emergency plan is in place.

## **LIFT CLUBS**

Lift clubs are the parent's responsibility. Please notify the school or lift club if your child is sick. Parents are to please inform the school of any change in lifting situations. We will not let the child leave the premises if we have not had notification directly from a parent or guardian of any changes.

## **MEDICATION**

Children that require oral medication are to inform the teachers. If this is a necessity the parent shall have to fill out a form requesting that the staff member administer medication to their child.

# **5. GENERAL**

## **PARKING**

Please be aware that there is limited parking so kindly show consideration for others. Please drive slowly and be aware of small people in this space. Parents are responsible for encouraging their children to be aware of the cars and for holding hands to keep safe.

## **SEX EDUCATION POLICY**

The national curriculum's policy on sex education revolves around body image (Gr 1-3). It also involves the care and safety of the body, especially regarding communicable diseases such as AIDS. At MAARA House, we further use a constructivist approach to any situation that may arise. We feel the attitudes and beliefs of children around these interests are important. Although we do not bring up 'sex' in any formal conversation or teaching with children, we support children in understanding and interpreting information in such a way that supports the growth of emotional intelligence. Teachers maintain an ongoing dialogue with the parents to keep them informed of the information we are sharing. We view sex education as a natural part of being human and of learning and will therefore be treated as such.

## **EXTRA-MURALS**

The school will offer several sports, creative and cultural extra-murals still to be determined. This may vary from term to term and from winter to summer, depending on what the teachers and parent body feel would be most welcome and most appropriate. If you have any ideas and suggestions that will support us, then please contact us.

## **SPORT**

Physical movement and co-ordination is an important part of our development. All children do movement/ sport and ball skills during school time. Team playing, co-operative skills and healthy competition are consciously worked on during these sessions. We offer weekly cycling lessons as part of the core curriculum

## **RELIGION**

We encourage children to share their beliefs and religious outlooks so we can get to know each other further. This creates understanding and acceptance as it is real and tangible. This is our friend who is talking to us, not some population that we did not even know existed. We come from a space of wanting to understand, opposed to judging and criticizing. We want to share in the meaning that each person makes of their place in the world. The school therefore does not teach or subscribe to one religious belief system.

## **NEW SCHOOL YEAR**

The first 3-4 weeks are often busy and overwhelming. The overwhelming part comes from the amount of information that is shared with parents via e-mail, the number of activities that parents can attend and the way in which the school is strongly organized to involve you in your child's development. It seems that things settle down comfortably thereafter.

The Teachers, Head of Learning and School Management at Maara House are there to help you; please ask questions when something is unclear.

## **NO SMOKING PLEASE**

The school has a 'no smoking' policy anywhere or anytime on the school grounds.

# **6. CLASSROOM ADMIN**

## **JOURNALS**

Photographs are taken regularly and reflected upon. These are then used to write journals highlighting events from the classroom activities and areas of interest around the curriculum. These journals are then shared with regularly so you have an insight to the happenings during the week and can engage your child around the topics they are exploring at school.

## **WEEKLY NEWSLETTERS**

The weekly newsletter will include any school administration information together with updates from teachers to share and inform parents of the previous week's activities and the projected future of where children's interest could go. We wish for you to be part of your child's learning and the e-mails may open up topics for conversation with your child so that learning can also happen in the home environment. Teachers really appreciate it when you also take the time to share with them your own weekly reflections and interactions with the children. This communication channel is not to be seen as a one-way process and we request you reply back as often as you are able.

## **SOCIAL INTEGRATION TIME**

The school values the time spent together in work and play. As such we have created a space called social integration time at the start of every school day. Children have access to all areas of the school and so do the parents. The importance of this time is to allow relationships to be nurtured and developed between children, parents and teachers. The emphasis of this time is meant to be in you nurturing the relationship with your child by engaging them in the different areas of the school. Do creative things with them, play board games together, or puzzles, or build sandcastles. This is about your child sharing their space with you. All children are required to be within the school grounds between 8:00 & 8:20am. Parents are to leave by 8:20am and the children will continue with social integration with each other until 8:30am. Parents are not required to stay until 8:20am. If your child is comfortable for you to 'drop and go', you are welcome to walk your child into the school, say goodbye and leave straight away.

## **FIELD TRIPS**

Field trips are an important part of our program. Parents will be invited to help with these field trips where possible. Children will be transported using Uber taxis, MyCiti Bus with teachers as supervisors. No teachers will be allowed to drive children in vehicles and all children will be using car safety belts. The indemnity form signed at the beginning of the year indemnifies MAARA HOUSE for all outings, education and/or sporting activities that take place off school premises.

## **PERSONAL FILE**

The more we know about your child, the more we can make informed decisions and the more we can support them. Each child has a personal file at school to which only the staff has access. In it we keep application and enrollment forms as well as copies of detailed progress reports. It would be of help to us if you could let us have copies of any other assessments they may have had. It is also very important for you to let us know about changes in behavior at home e.g. nightmares, tearfulness, eating poorly, not wanting to come to school, etc. It is also most important that parents keep the school informed of any changes in contact details should we need to



## 7. CLASSROOM PROCESSES AND SYSTEMS

### BEING ON TIME

Being on time is a core commitment of being part of the school. All children need to be in the school grounds by no later than 08h20. Likewise, meetings and workshops will also start punctually. Please make every effort to be on time for start of school and any meetings or workshops you may attend. If you are continually late the teachers and/or School Management may engage you to see what can be done in offering you support.

### BEHAVIOR GUIDELINES AND MEDIATION PROCESS

The Behaviour Guidelines set out below are not to be seen as a set of rules but as a declaration of intent by MAARA House. Our behaviour is a result of many complex interactions and reactions.

These Behaviour Guidelines provide us with a structure through which we can further explore our combined understandings of your child's behaviour. In this way we, as teachers and parents, can support the experiences your children are going through. 'Classroom Agreements' as well as 'School Agreements' will be negotiated and drawn up with the participation and negotiation of all children, teachers and staff. It is important to define that an 'agreement' is the *result* of a powerful dialogue and conflict resolution and not the *goal* of it. At the same time the consequences to the infringements of these agreements will be articulated and agreed upon. It is important that this process is shared by all participants of the schooling experience. It is also understood that these agreements will be dynamic in that they will always be open for discussion (and change if deemed appropriate), throughout the year.

#### Process

All children are encouraged to co-operate within their 'Guidelines' by understanding them and by having developed the 'Infringement Consequences' with the support of the teacher. When it comes to our attention that a child is consistently unable to co-operate within reasonable means, then we continue with a more intense period of observation. Both teachers and parents will assist in the process of discovering how to support the needs of the child. The school and home will work together. If there is additional assistance needed, the parents will be informed and encouraged to assist in this process for the wellbeing of their child. Children will be encouraged to understand the general need for all of us to care about one another's well-being. Children will be encouraged to verbalise and express their feelings to one another, as this is fundamental to our support of them in relationship building. They will be encouraged to problem solve and find solutions to working with one another. The role of the teacher is there to provide a safe space for children to grapple with the difficulties of conflict resolution and to provide a supportive, non-judgmental and understanding environment. Parents will be informed on a regular basis on this element of their child's development and encouraged to be a support when necessary.

#### Behavioural guidelines - timeline

When a teacher begins to notice a pattern of emotional behavior, he/she will embark on a process of 'Supporting and Understanding' while maintaining communication with the child. Simultaneously the parents will be contacted and informed of the type of behaviour with the option of an interview with the teacher. This process will be documented. Parents and teachers will continue observing the child. At all times the intention is to be supportive and understanding. They will then meet again to communicate their observations and evaluate the circumstances. An agreement will be made on how to continue supporting all participants involved.

An interview with all present (including the child) would assist the process, as the child will be aware that there is support and understanding of their issues. This part of the process is really important as the child needs to be aware and experience that the school and home are saying the same thing. If, after a month, the child is still displaying inappropriate behaviour, additional support may be required and requested (outside support).

### BIRTHDAYS

Birthdays are an important part of being human. It is the celebration of being alive and acknowledging that on an annual basis. Children are welcome to wear civvies and to bring a birthday treat to school after having checked with the class teacher what they think might be appropriate.

The teachers and the class will create a special celebration. Parents are welcome to attend.

#### Birthday party invitations policy

If all children in the class are invited, the invitations can be given out in the school environment. If a select few are to be invited, then this needs to happen outside of all the school grounds (i.e. not even in the parking lot. In other words children would need to be individually phoned or e-mailed).

#### **FOOD AND SNACK TIMES**

Our school supports and encourages healthy eating.

Students will eat snacks/lunch in their classroom or possibly outside on a nice day. Students will have a quiet period during snack/lunch time to provide time to actually eat. We all contribute to the cleanliness of the school. Each student is responsible for cleaning up after snack time – this includes their individual waste, as well as the area in which they ate.

Children usually eat snacks between 10am and 10:15am and lunch between 12.00-12.30, depending on the flow of the day. As we are currently a small school, we have a shared snacks and lunch policy. Each parent will be responsible for the snack and lunch meal once every 10 days. A food roster with snack and meal details will be provided termly based on the season and fresh produce available. The budget is around R200/day (which works out to R20/day for each parent). This shared policy is to save parents time and energy in needing to pack a snack and lunch daily. A packed lunch is to be brought in individually by each child on a Friday for the weekly outing.

Water must be packed (in a marked water bottle) for your child. We have a water filter at the school to refill water bottles with good quality water. We discourage bringing juice to school.

Children who stay after 1:30pm for aftercare will need to bring an additional snack for their child. We discourage the inclusion of items containing sugar and additives. At the same time, we recognize that it is a personal choice as to what to pack for your child and healthy eating will mean different things to different families.

Please note that at birthday times, the birthday child may bring in cake, muffins or other for the rest of the class. We cannot regulate what they bring (although we ask that it falls within the food guidelines highlighted above). In the event that you do not want your child eating any of these, please ensure the teacher knows this, and you have given a suitable replacement. In other words, if you wish for your child not to have cupcakes etc., please ensure the teacher has a good stock of other celebratory foods in her cupboard that she can give your child (on any given day) as a substitute.

A big plastic container full of dry goods such as rice cakes, crackers, raw honey, organic peanut butter etc will be kept in the classroom. Children are allowed to access this if they are very hungry. Parents will be asked to contribute to this when it is their turn to bring the snack/lunch.

If your child is sick/absent and it is your day to organise the food, please try and let our Head of Nutrition – Robyne Chadwick - know the night before so that she can arrange for the next person on the list to organise something. Our extra container full of dry food will also come in handy in this regard.

#### **TOYS**

Please assist us with this. We value the importance of sharing our personal belongings with others. It boosts our self-esteem and is an important part of our social interactions. At the same time, any toys or possessions children bring to school must be kept in their bags until morning rings. They can then be shown and will then be placed back into bags or kept somewhere safe. Children seem to relate to this really well. We do not always have the time to get to see everyone's toys (as there is only so much time in the morning) and this is part of the learning process for children.

#### **NOTICE BOARDS**

Notices will mostly be sent via e-mail and on the parent whatsapp group so please ensure you check both regularly.

## **PARENT/TEACHER FEEDBACK**

Verbal feedback discussions between the teacher and parents will happen termly.

Each registered parent will also be required to write a report about your child in term 2 and 4, sharing your observations of their development over the last few months.. The templates for these reports will be sent to you well in advance and you will be notified of the date of return.

We encourage continuous feedback between parents and teachers so please arrange a time to meet with the teachers at any time outside of these more 'formal' termly feedback sessions should the need arise.

## **REPORTS**

A report will be compiled for each child after the 2nd and 4th terms. This will provide all the relevant areas of assessment that are required by the CAPS curriculum to indicate your child's level of competence.

# **8. OUR PARENTING PROGRAM**

At MAARA House we recognise that parents are the child's first teachers. Children learn best when parents are involved in their educational program. The primary bridge between home and school is the involvement of family and community. MAARA House encourages parents to take accountability and responsibility, together with the teaching staff, for their child's education. Every parent and/or caregiver who enrolls their child/ren at MAARA House will therefore be required to attend our regular parent workshops to be held once a term. We value the fulfilment of parents' commitments in the same light as the payment of school fees.

**Parent Workshops**, which will be done by MAARA HOUSE, will bring immense value to your life and to your interaction with your child. Other specialists/experts will be invited to offer diverse workshops, depending on the needs of the parents and staff. If you feel you would like to find out more about a topic, or need more support in a certain area, please speak to us about any workshop ideas/needs.

## **SCHOOL SHARES**

Every term the staff and parent body hold a school sharing meeting where the school creates a space for parents to share their ideas. Likewise, the school shares with the parents their current understanding of how things are going. These sessions are about sharing and bringing to our awareness what may need to happen to ensure a more positive school environment. Parents are required to attend at least two of the four annual sessions. Two will be within school hours and the other two in the evenings to ensure opportunity for all parents. To support you in your yearly planning, we will give you the dates for these in the termly calendar.

## **SCHOOL SOCIALS**

We value the building and nurturing of relationships. Therefore, there will be socials organized to bring parents and children together once a term. The nature of these will be determined on a termly basis.

## **PARENT RING WEEK**

Twice a year, parents are invited to join their child's group for morning rings. This happens over a period of a week. If the class is really active, teachers have been known to ask for parents to book a day so as to prevent overcrowding. The purpose of the parent morning rings is to share with parents how we engage children and how we open up their thinking. It also gives parents insights into the school process and it gives children a sense of importance as their parent is taking an interest in their day. The rings occur during the social integration time so this should not interfere with a parent's normal daily schedule. The rings start punctually at 08h00 and the doors close. If a child or parent arrives after the starting time, the child needs to remain in the playground until their class door re-opens. Parents can choose to remain with their children during this time. A staff member will be supervising this area.

## 9. ISSUE RESOLUTION PROCESS

At MAARA House we are committed to delivering high quality education and care. At the same time we recognise that sometimes things go wrong and you may feel that your expectations for your child or of the school are not being met. When such moments arise, please know that we remain strongly committed to working together with you through the conflict until it reaches a natural resolution point. If you have a concern, complaint or unresolved issue, then you are encouraged to raise it.

It is important that we talk, listen and together find solutions so that we can improve your child's experience and learning, and improve our services to the community. We all want the best outcome for both you and your child and are committed to following a process that is supportive, respectful and effective for all.

The following guide aims to provide information about: what to do if you have a concern or complaint; who to speak to about it; the different steps available for you to make use of; how we can support and guide you through the process. While this guide aims to help you raise concerns, keep in mind that we also welcome your positive feedback and compliments, which can sometimes be overlooked in our busy lives

### **About concerns or complaints**

Parents are encouraged to raise concerns or complaints which may be about:

- an experience your child or you have had at school
- the type, level or quality of services
- the behaviour and decisions of staff
- a policy, procedure or practice
- (Sometimes a complaint could be about something we have to do because of National or Regional law – which we would be very happy to talk through with you.)

### **What to do if you have a concern or complaint**

So that we can all work together to get the best outcome for your child, there are some simple steps to keep in mind if you have a complaint or concern.

Please note that we strongly encourage you to raise your concerns or complaints as they arise and to engage directly and respectfully with those involved – what we call “going to source”.

### **Step 1 – Talk to the teacher**

The teacher should always be your first point of contact. Find an appropriate time to talk to your child's class teacher to discuss your concern or complaint.

At the meeting a *MAARA House Parent Meeting form* will be completed, of which you will get a copy. The form will document the concern or complaint, the agreed next steps and timelines. A follow-up meeting/phone call or check-in will be setup to check progress against agreed steps and timelines.

### **Step 2 – Talk to the School Management**

If the concern or complaint remains unresolved please speak to either Taryn or Lauren to arrange a time to meet together with them. The *Parent Meeting Form* would also need to be completed to capture the agreed next steps and timelines for actions.

### **Additional support with a concern or complaint**

If you would like to raise a concern or complaint but are unsure of how to go about it, please speak to a MAARA House member of staff who can provide additional support.

Staff members are able to:

- explain and guide you through the MAARA House approach to conflict and resolution
- clarify the problem and help you formulate your concern or complaint
- identify who would be best for you to talk to next
- gather relevant information about policies and procedures and discuss these with you if needed
- follow-up on the progress or outcome of your concern or complaint

## 10. MAARA DICTIONARY

MAARA SPEAK	TRANSLATION
<b>Agreements</b>	Mutually agreed ‘contracts’ about how children, staff and parents will exist in the same space together. An alternative to traditional rules, conflicts and punishment. Rather, holding each other accountable when agreements are not kept, with prior agreed consequences.
<b>(For your) Awareness</b>	Sharing something that someone feels you should be aware of, but without expecting anything from you necessarily – not an issue they have, but something they’ve picked up or observed and wish you to be aware of to take into account in future interactions.
<b>Check-In</b>	Just touching base to make sure all is OK, ask a question, get clarity, clear possible misunderstandings etc.- usually shared as a question. <i>Can I check-in with you?</i> Can also be a regularly scheduled check in during meetings.
<b>Clearing</b>	When there is unsaid or implied conflict, a person can request a clearing where they can share the impact of the perceived conflict on them and request individuals share with them directly, at that time or separately.
<b>Co-teachers</b>	A two teacher model where both teachers are responsible for the multi-age class
<b>Teacher support</b>	A person who works alongside either one or both core teachers in a supportive role.
<b>Descriptive praise</b>	This is about identifying exactly what it is you like about the picture/piece of work or behavior and describing exactly what it is you observe. So instead of <i>“that’s beautiful”</i> , you say <i>“I love all the colours you’ve used and the way you’ve drawn a special heart for me in the corner”</i> .
<b>Emergent curriculum</b>	Where the children choose their area of interest and the teacher maps the requirements of the CAPs curriculum against their area of interest i.e. CAPS requires graphs and the children have chosen Space as their theme, so instead of a worksheet on the theory and application of graphs, the teacher asks the children to do a graph of the distance of the planets from the sun.
<b>Empowered</b>	Children and adults being comfortable and authentic and saying when something is working for them or not, and what they need for it to work as well as holding each other accountable for agreements made.
<b>Experiential learning</b>	Children get to engage with the task at hand so rather than just complete a worksheet, they cook, run around the playground, make models etc. – addressing the multi-intelligences rather than just the traditional academic model of instruction, auditory processing and rote learning.
<b>Emotional Intelligence</b>	The Emotional Intelligence aspect of our curriculum. The ability to identify, acknowledge, verbalise and manage one’s emotions, asking for what someone needs, particularly within a group.
<b>Multi-aging</b>	Where children from two grades are schooled together, allowing for children’s 18month developmental window and for children to consolidate in their weaker areas and extend in their stronger areas. It also refers to older classes spending time with younger classes, reading to them, making connections, guiding them etc.
<b>Not working for me</b>	Children and adults share when something is impacting them in a negative way, without

	judgement or blame. The idea is that a conversation then follows to explore how and why "it" is being experienced negatively and how it could be different.
<b>Provocation</b>	Something that provokes thoughts, ideas, discussions, interests and creativity or expands on any of the above. They will form the starting point for new projects, ideas and areas of learning interest in the curriculum
<b>Support</b>	Rather than 'help', which implies that you are not capable on your own, we can 'support' which is to help you to find your own way, with guidance or coaching.
<b>Thinking faces</b>	A means by which children can indicate non-verbally how they feel in different situations. 4 faces each of a different colour will be used to help children identify their feeling of competency in an activity on a scale from needing help to being completely independent.
<b>Unpack</b>	Let's explore what may or may not lie behind this issue, without judgement and with curiosity at the forefront i.e. not in reaction (angry or upset and emotional).

## APPENDIX A: PARENT FAQ'S

### WHY ARE WE CALLING OURSELVES A PROGRESSIVE SCHOOL?

This chart, from *Independent Schools*, is a helpful guide in understanding the differences between traditional and constructivist/progressive education. We think the description of progressive education in this chart is a good description of the approach that the teacher/s strive for at our School.

Traditional	Progressive
School is a preparation for life.	School is a part of life.
Learners are passive absorbers of information and authority.	Learners are active participants, problem solvers, and planners.
Teachers are sources of information and authority.	Teachers are facilitators, guides who foster thinking.
Parents are outsiders and uninvolved.	Parents are the primary teachers, goal setters, and planners, and serve as resources.
Community is separate from school, except for funding.	Community is an extension of the classroom.
Decision-making is centrally based and administratively delivered.	Decision-making is shared by all constituent groups.
Program is determined by external criteria, particularly test results.	Program is determined by mission, philosophy, and goals for graduates.
Learning is linear, with factual accumulation and skill mastery.	Learning is spiral, with depth and breadth as goals.
Knowledge is absorbed through lectures, worksheets, and texts.	Knowledge is constructed through play, direct experience, and social interaction.
Instruction is linear and largely based on correct answers.	Instruction is related to central questions and inquiry, often generated by the children.
Disciplines, particularly language and math, are separated.	Disciplines are integrated as children make connections.
Skills are taught discretely and are viewed as goals.	Skills are related to content and are viewed as tools.
Assessment is norm-referenced, external, and graded.	Assessment is benchmarked, has many forms, and is progress-oriented.
Success is competitively based, derived from recall and memory, and specific to a time/place.	Success is determined through application over time, through collaboration.
Products are the end point.	Products are subsumed by process considerations.
Intelligence is a measure of linguistic and logical/mathematical abilities.	Intelligence is recognized as varied, includes the arts, and is measured in real-life problem-solving.
School is a task to be endured.	School is a challenging and fun part of life.

Source: Robert G. Peters, with thanks to the books *Schools of Quality*, by John Jay Bonstigl, and *In Search of Understanding*, by Martin C. Brooks and Jaqueline Grennon, *Independent Schools*.

### WHAT IS THE REGGIO EMILIA APPROACH?

The **Reggio Emilia approach** is an educational philosophy focused on preschool and primary education. It was developed after World War II by a psychologist Loris Malaguzzi, and parents in the villages around Reggio Emilia in Italy. Following the war, people believed that children were in need of a new way of learning. The assumption of Malaguzzi and the parents was that people form their own personality during early years of development and that children are endowed with "a hundred languages" through which they can express their ideas. The aim of this approach is teaching how to use these symbolic languages (e.g., painting, sculpting, drama) in everyday life. The program is based on the principles of respect, responsibility, and community through exploration and

discovery in a supportive and enriching environment based on the interests of the children through a self-guided curriculum

For more information visit: <https://reggio.co.za/>

## **HOW DO YOU ENSURE THAT THE ACADEMIC ASPECTS ARE COVERED WITHIN YOUR PROGRESSIVE SCHOOL APPROACH?**

We will follow what is known as an EMERGENT CURRICULUM covering the academic requirements of the grades (with CAPs as a baseline). Emergent curriculum is a philosophy of teaching and way of planning curriculum that focuses on being responsive to children's interests to create meaningful learning experiences and can be practiced at any grade level. This philosophy prioritizes active participation, relationship building, flexible and adaptable methods, inquiry, and play-based learning.

An idea for a curriculum topic may be sparked by things, people, events in the environment, issues that arise in the classroom, etc. For instance, a teacher may overhear a group of children having a discussion about restaurants they went to on the weekend. This leads to the class sitting down and coming up with ideas that explore all the possible directions the class could go in their quest to learn all they can about the topic of restaurants. Ideas may also be sparked by offering experiences such as taking a walk through the neighborhood, visiting local businesses, or reading books. Activities will have a curricular theme. For example, the literacy area may allow opportunity to write customer orders while the math area may have plastic money for the children to experiment with. There is active participation with the content an opportunity to involve all the senses, challenge creativity, hear and use oral and written language, explore art media, practice solving interpersonal problems, conduct investigations and ask questions, explore and order material, and acquire various physical skills. This also ensures that all children's learning styles are catered for.

Supporting the emergent curriculum, the development of emotional intelligence, resilience and change agility will underpin all the learning at the school. All children experience big feelings on a daily basis. They often feel powerless and pushed around, angry, sad, frightened, or jealous. The focus on these core EQ skills will ensure healthy emotional development of our children.

## **WHAT ABOUT BOUNDARIES AND DISCIPLINE?**

Progressive schooling does not mean that there are no boundaries or discipline in the school. A safe and accepting learning environment is essential for student achievement and well-being.

A positive school climate means everyone – students, parents, staff and community members – feels safe, welcome and respected. Everyone has a role to play in promoting healthy relationships and a school climate, which encourages appropriate student behaviour. Our aim is to create a positive school climate by:

- collaboratively promoting positive student behaviour through 'classroom promises' as a basis for how we will co-exist in the space. Children are encouraged to take full accountability for maintaining their 'class promises' and to work together to determine appropriate consequences. If a child is not able to manage within those promises, we follow a progressive approach where the following will be taken into consideration:
  - the students' stage of growth and development
  - the nature and severity of the behaviour
  - the impact of the behaviour on the class/school climate
- We recognise that negative behavior in a child stems from a variety of environmental, emotional, social and biological issues in a child's life. All children exhibit 'bad' behavior from time to time due to the stresses of daily life. Together with the child, the parents, the teacher and her observations, we will determine what is not working and what support may be required to enable the child to work within the classroom promises going forward.



## **DO WE OFFER SUPPORT FOR CHILDREN WITH LEARNING DIFFICULTIES?**

We are a school offering progressive education. It is important to understand that we are **not** a remedial school. Your choice to send your child to our school is centered on your wanting a different approach to education.

## **WHAT ABOUT HOMEWORK?**

We subscribe to a minimal homework policy. We don't want our children to do hours of homework – it is important that children go home and play and engage in activities that interest them such as sport, cooking, music or just quiet time. Any 'work' that is sent home would be to engage the parents and students in a community of inquiry and promote curiosity, creative thinking, logical skill-building and discussion techniques, rather than a tedious 'task' to complete for the sake of keeping busy. These activities will most likely emerge during the week and will be inspired by the children's line of inquiry and will not be assessed in any way or insisted upon. It may also be that the children decide on a task to complete at home by themselves, such as creating a math game to play with their peers, or building a rocket out of a toilet paper roll. They might decide to work together on a collaborative project after school hours. This kind of enthusiasm will be encouraged. We will also be encouraging families and the children to read before bed at night!

## **HOW ARE THE CHILDREN ASSESSED? WILL THEY HAVE THE RIGHT DOCUMENTATION TO APPLY TO OTHER SCHOOLS SHOULD THEY CHANGE SCHOOLS AT A LATER STAGE?**

The work that will be completed throughout the year will be CAPS-aligned. This means that the CAPS curriculum will be used as the basis for our own curriculum. Thus your child will be able to make a smooth transition from our school to any other CAPS-aligned institution, including most independent schools. The main difference between the CAPS curriculum and a CAPS-Aligned curriculum is that we have greater discretion over which elements to spend more time on. Everything is still covered, but if your child is struggling with repeated addition and is breezing through subtraction, we will be able to spend the necessary time on the more difficult elements before moving on. The second advantage of pursuing a CAPS-Aligned curriculum is that we are not subjected to an onslaught of assessments. Assessments are extremely important when they serve a diagnostic purpose, i.e. they help identify the areas a child may be struggling with so that greater support can be provided. They are not beneficial in and of themselves and more often than not cause high levels of anxiety and stress in children who should see learning as a fun and engaging activity. Documentation and classwork will thus play a large role in assessing the progress of your child, including the work produced in core lessons, and photographs/videos of their installations and artworks. Samples of this work will be brought to a weekly teacher development meeting with another Reggio Emilia inspired school to ensure that our children are, in the largest sense of the word, 'on track'. We will also be participating in the ANAS (Annual National Assessments) in to ensure that we are meeting national assessment standards. We will also have a weekly spelling quiz.

The space for parental involvement in the timetable means that you will be continually updated on the progress of your child. If there are any major concerns, a learning strategy can be planned and implemented immediately. We wish for our children to understand that assessments are actually extremely beneficial – they allow us to discover what we don't know, which is a wonderful thing! They should be stress-free activities and not the 'be-all-and-end-all' of a child's academic success. They are also more effective when viewed as a continuous journey of work that is produced, rather than a 'once off' snapshot of a child's ability.

## **WHAT ABOUT A MULTIAGE AND GRADE CLASS?**

Multiage classrooms are composed of students who are more than one year apart. Students remain with the same teacher for more than one year. Multiage classrooms are made up of a mix of abilities and ages. Students are not grouped based solely on age and academic performance. Multiage classrooms reflect the natural groupings found in our neighborhoods, communities and in the world, and provide opportunities for the exchange of ideas, modeling of behaviors, practice of responsibility and nurturance, and development of leadership and social skills.

### **Several principles and practices are foundational to multiage classrooms:**

- Teacher is the facilitator of learning (rather than the keeper of knowledge)
- Developmentally appropriate, child centered, continuous learning
- Integrated Curriculum
- Attention to the education of the whole child

Research strongly suggests that children benefit in many ways from multiage classrooms (Miller 1990). Academically, children usually do better in multiage classrooms than in traditional classrooms (Anderson & Pavan, 1993). If they don't do better, then they do the same. Multiage classrooms clearly do not negatively affect academic achievement (Miller, 1990).

In addition, the benefits for children, socially and emotionally, are consistently higher for multiage classrooms. The affective domain is greatly impacted by multiage classrooms. From his review of the research, Miller (1990, 7) notes, "When it comes to student affect, the case for multigrade organization appears much stronger, with multigrade students out-performing single-grade students in over 75 percent of the measures used."

- **Is the multiage classroom better for some children, but not for others?**

This question assumes that traditional classrooms are the best way to educate children. As you investigate the philosophy of multiage classrooms, you quickly conclude that this child-centered approach is good for all children. Shouldn't all children be able to progress at their own pace? Shouldn't all children view themselves as successful, competent learners? Shouldn't all children be able to learn from peers without competing? Shouldn't all children have the opportunity to be mentored and to mentor?

- **Do older children benefit from a multiage classroom?**

In multiage classrooms, all children, even the older children, are on their own continuum of learning. The curriculum is opened up for ALL the children. The older child is able to go as far as he or she is able to go just as the younger child is. Oftentimes in a same-grade classroom, some children who have accomplished the curriculum stagnate or get bored with learning things they already know. This does not happen in the multiage program. The older child is able to progress beyond the traditional curriculum limits.

Older children also benefit socially and emotionally. Older children have the opportunity to mentor younger children. This allows all the older children to gain confidence and increase their self-esteem. Without the strong competitions of same-age classrooms, older children are free to cooperate and help others. Moreover, children learn by teaching as explaining concepts, or checking spelling or Math for a younger child, solidifies their knowledge and allows older children to grow extensively.

They are not held back by a prescribed grade-level curriculum. The open-ended curriculum in a multiage classroom encourages children to explore, discover, and invent. Children have the freedom to pursue their interests and the opportunity to creatively expand their knowledge. According to research children who are in multiage classrooms are more confident learners and quickly adapt to same-age classrooms should they move to another school at a later stage. One positive aspect is that they have had time to enjoy seeing themselves as competent learners.

- **How does a multiage classroom work?**

Preparation, resources and independent/small group learning is extremely important in a multiage classroom. This is because although children may be presented with the same content, the tasks they will be able to complete will vary according to their level/ability. For example, a piece of writing may be presented in a literacy workshop. Some children may go about the task of identifying the capital 'A' letters and full stops (an awareness of sentence structure and letter construction that caters for emergent readers), while others look for CVC words containing the 'a' vowel. Both groups then practice modelling what they have learnt in various mediums – half practice writing capital 'A' letters in the sand and half draw CVC 'a' words. Some children might need further extension – like using these words in a sentence or story, which they can present to the class later in the day. The benefit of this approach is that children who are strong in certain areas can extend themselves regardless of age. Therefore, it may be that a 'grade 1' child is reading at a 'grade 2' level but remains at a 'grade 1' level for numeracy. This is also why independent learning and small group collaborations are strongly encouraged – one group may be doing shared reading in the reading corner or be participating in an educational numeracy game

with the teaching assistant, while another group finishes a task that requires greater guidance from the teacher. The combination of a teacher and teaching assistant has been decided upon to properly manage this dynamic.

### **WHAT ARE THE EFFECTS OF A SMALL CLASS?**

- With smaller class sizes, teachers can get to know each student as an individual, working with them to enhance their strengths and improve their weaknesses.
  - Teachers can tailor instruction more individually so that it meets your child's particular level.
  - There's less disruption. In larger classes, discipline begins to take up more of the class than actual teaching and learning. In a classroom with fewer students, discipline is needed far less often.
  - They're quieter. Even when everyone in the classroom is extremely well behaved, a larger classroom is noisy. There's a constant rustling of papers, sniffing noses, students shifting in their seats. For a student with attention issues, those small distractions can be the difference between engaging deeply with the content of the theme and one that they don't understand at all.
  - Students get to know each other better. Instead of your child just being another face in a huge crowd, they'll be more likely to develop deep and lasting relationships with the other children around them.
- **What about my child's social needs in a small school?**

When children are in a small school it is important to recognize that parents need to play an active role to enhance and extend the opportunity for social interactions beyond school. Here are some ideas:

- Look for ways to be active in the community. There are a number of clubs, organizations, and sports teams that don't require enrollment in a particular school. We are also members of the "cottage school's group" that hold regular socials, sports days and opportunities to meet. This will be integrated into our school calendar where possible.
- Find time for friends. Chances are, your child will be leaving at least a couple of friends behind in their previous school. Set up play dates. Your children will have the afternoons free to PLAY and not be stressed about homework. In addition, make plans for fun events with friends. These friends are an important part of your child's life and one that they will be relieved to keep.

### **WHAT IS EXPECTED OF ME AS A PARENT?**

In order for a school like this to work, it is essential that there is a strong values alignment between the school and each family. We believe that educating your child is a partnership and that relationships form the cornerstone of our approach to education.

The following will be required:

- At the start of the year attendance at a parent orientation workshop and it is our intention to hold 2-3 parent evenings throughout the year.
- Parents may be called upon to assist with lifts for outings if necessary on a termly basis.
- Due to the experiential nature of the learning in the school – potential visits to parent's workplaces etc may be requested.
- We will also be hosting some fundraising activities during the year
- There will be a parent-teacher meeting at the end of every term
- Finally, as opposed to 'dropping your child at the school gate' we encourage parents to spend some time with their child in the morning (if its possible) and have a chance to settle their child and to touch base with the teacher

### **WHERE WILL OUR CHILDREN GO AFTER MAARA HOUSE?**

If at any stage you choose not to continue with us – your child will integrate seamlessly into another progressive or mainstream school with the relevant portfolios, documentation and assessments. Our goal is to educate the

whole child – physically, emotionally and academically – so that we give our children an advantage that cannot be provided by mainstream schooling. Moving to other schools after this type of progressive foundation phase learning will equip your children for their future education and way of being in the world.