



## *The Right Choice*

It is natural for parents to worry about the choices they make for their child's education. When that choice is different from the mainstream, the worry is compounded.

Parents whose children are at Montessori Preschools often express the concern that their children may not be accepted into conventional primary schools without having completed formal Grade R. They pose questions such as "Will my child be up to standard?" or "Will my child be accepted in a 'normal' school?" There are essentially two different issues. The first is concerned with the child and what he or she has learned in Montessori compared to what will be covered in conventional Grade R. The answer to that is simple. The Montessori curriculum, if properly delivered over a three year cycle, will take a child further in all areas of cognitive development than any Grade R programme. Emotional and social development will also be more advanced. There is sound research to back up these claims for Montessori.

The second issue is whether a conventional private or government school will accept a child from a Montessori school. The answer to this question is a little more complex. Private schools are legally allowed to set their own enrolment policies and can decide to accept into Grade 1 only children who have attended their own Grade R. Many do this simply to be able to control enrolment and choose who will be accepted into their Grade 1 classes. Government schools, on the other hand, may not refuse admission on the grounds of whether or not a child has attended their own, or any other Grade R class. The complication here is that they do give priority to those children who have attended that school's Grade R. Most schools have more Grade 1 places than Grade Rs, so there are usually places available for children coming from other pre-schools and these

places have to be allocated according to strict criteria ("catchment area" and order of application for a place). Children cannot be refused a place on the basis of where they previously attended, although some schools may try to do this.

The Department of Basic Education (DBE) and the Department of Social Development recognise Montessori as a distinct curriculum. As such, Montessori schools are not required to register separate Grade R classes. Furthermore, while the DBE is working towards universalising Grade R, it is not currently compulsory, nor is it expected to be any time before 2014 at the very earliest.

There are many ways which Montessori Schools can help parents get their children into the schools of their choice, but the most successful is to hold firm to the Montessori curriculum and methodology and to encourage parents to leave their children in Montessori for the full three year cycle. It is this complete experience that results in the true Montessori outcomes. Primary schools which have enrolled Montessori children in the past get to know what to expect, and welcome articulate, confident and co-operative children who enjoy learning and interact positively with their peers.

SAMA will be making a number of resources available over the next few months to help parents navigate these challenging decisions, and to better inform conventional primary schools on what to expect from Montessori children.

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