



What's the difference between traditional Montessori and other types of curricula?

In the Traditional classroom you'll find children of similar ages being actively taught by a teacher who is directing activities. This is group-based learning with an emphasis on whole-class, structured, active teaching. Although children sometimes work alone, most of the time they work in groups.

In the Montessori classroom, you'll find children aged between two-and-a-half and six years. Although children sometimes work in groups, most of the time they work alone or in pairs. The emphasis is self-directed learning, supplemented by teachers directing each child towards learning opportunities when needed. Having children of different ages in the same classroom provides the younger ones with role models for imitation, and gives older children an opportunity to reinforce their own knowledge by helping younger ones. We see this often happening in our schools.

How does Woodland adapt the Montessori programme to follow the UK curriculum?

The Montessori curriculum is divided into five learning areas – Practical Life, Sensorial, Mathematics, Language and Cultural, which are comparable to the Early Learning Areas of the EYFS. The remaining two learning areas of the EYFS, Expressive Arts and Physical Development, are incorporated daily in all areas of learning.

How do kids who've been through Montessori adapt to a mainstream school in primary or secondary, if required?

Parents have asked me that question many times but none of them have ever come back to me to say that their children couldn't adapt to a mainstream school. I have experienced it myself with my third child moving up smoothly from Woodland Montessori to an International School. I would say that children who have been in a Montessori setting are generally very independent and are able to make choices without adult assistance,



making it very easy for them to adjust to new situations.

Tell us a bit about your own experiences with putting children through school in Hong Kong.

When we moved here about 10 years ago, spaces were not as limited as today. At the time I applied for two schools, CIS and ESF Peak. Sebastian, my eldest son, was lucky enough to be offered a place in both schools. We chose CIS, and my daughter Saskia and youngest son Alex also got offered a place at CIS through sibling priority.

What is your expat "trail"? Where were you before HK? What brought you here?

My husband and I lived in London and New York before moving to Hong Kong. My husband's work commitments brought us here. We were supposed to stay for two years and here we are 10

years later!

Where are you from originally and what do you miss most about it?

I'm half Dutch and half Belgian but I grew up in Switzerland, which I consider my home. I try to go back to see my family in the Alps twice a year and I do miss the cheese fondues – and the clean air!

What are some of the things you like to do in Hong Kong when you're not working?

When I have time for myself (which is rare with three kids), I go running or hiking, and I'm lucky enough to live right at the bottom of Violet Hill and the Twins so no excuse not getting up there.

For more information about the many Woodland campuses, visit [woodlandschools.com](http://woodlandschools.com).

INA-LESTER SMITH, Curriculum Coordinator at Woodland Pre-Schools, gives us an insight into her job, and reflects on her ten years in Hong Kong.



Tell us a bit about your role at Woodland.

Where to start! In a nutshell, as Curriculum Coordinator I am responsible for keeping up the high standard of education we provide across all Woodland schools. I visit all schools on a rotation, making sure policies and practices are being upheld in the classrooms. I meet all teachers on my rounds and offer guidance and support where necessary. I ensure new teachers are supported and provide additional training if needed.

On the days I'm not visiting schools, I plan professional development days and coordinate the events. I conduct meetings with Lead Teachers, and our Mandarin and Prep Coordinator. I work on keeping our UK accreditations (Pre-School Learning Alliance and The Montessori Evaluation and Accreditation Board) up to date. And from time to time I'm asked to write an article for a magazine!

What's your favourite aspect of the job?

Seeing the children's happy and smiley faces every morning and being able to look back at the end of the school year realising how much they've matured. I take pride in seeing them move on to the "big school" knowing that they have acquired a solid foundation in this nurturing environment.

What subjects are covered at Woodland?

Woodland Pre-Schools follow the British curriculum called the Early Years Foundation Stage. Both our Traditional and Montessori schools cover the same seven EYFS learning areas:

- Communication and Language
- Physical Development
- Personal, Social and Emotional Development
- Literacy
- Mathematics
- Understanding the World
- Expressive Arts and Design