

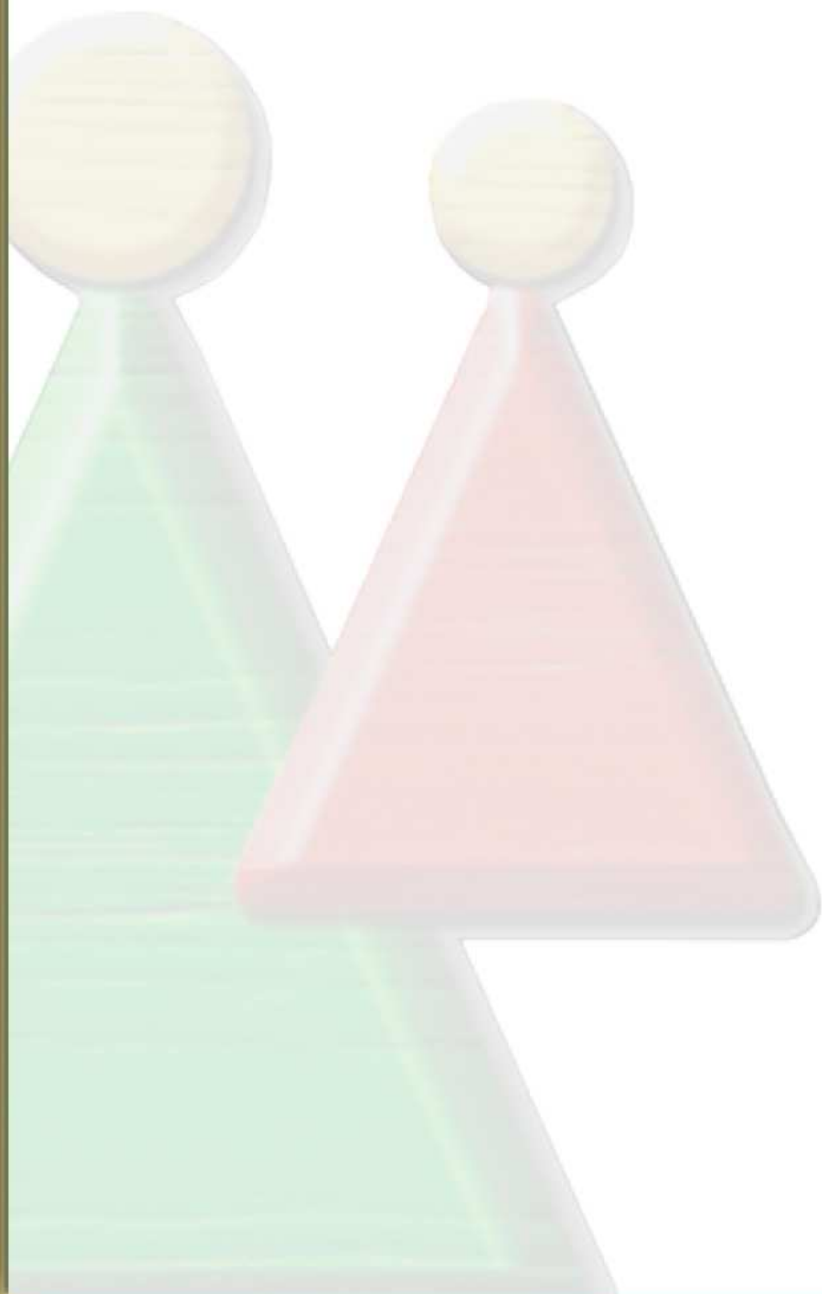


MONTESSORI

# Montessori Case Study

## Gorton Mount Primary School Manchester

*'A successful partnership in raising pupil achievement'*



# **GORTON MOUNT PRIMARY SCHOOL**

## **MONTESSORI CASE STUDY**

15 July 2010

**Carol Powell – Head Teacher, Gorton Mount Primary School**

**Mount Road, Gorton, Manchester, M18 7GR**

**Tel: 0161 224 5526**

**Email: [admin@gortonmount.manchester.sch.uk](mailto:admin@gortonmount.manchester.sch.uk)**

### **What is the context of the school?**

Gorton Mount Primary School was built in 1927. It originally operated as separate Infant and Junior Schools. These schools were amalgamated in 2000. The school is run by a Governing Body and each governor has specific monitoring and evaluating responsibilities.

The senior management team consists of the Head teacher, two Deputy Head teachers, Foundation Co-ordinator, KS1 Co-ordinator, KS2 Co-ordinator Curriculum Development Leader, Ethnic Minority Achievement Leader, Emotional Literacy Co-ordinator and SENCo.

### **Where is the school?**

The school is situated two miles east of the City of Manchester Stadium and serves the East Gorton community, a district that is in the top 10% most deprived areas in the country. It is characterised by unemployment, high crime rates – especially amongst the youth population, drug misuse, poor health and literacy levels and high gang membership.

### **The size and structure of school**

We have 456 children, aged from 3 – 11 years old, on roll at the present time. This figure varies through the year due to our high mobility rate of 38%. Last year the Y6 cohort experienced 77% mobility between KS1(Y2) and KS2 as calculated by the DCSF. Mobility is so high because of the local authority housing used for asylum seekers, the mobility of families who have Social services involvement and the high level of rental accommodation in the area. School is organised into 16 classes – two form entry. We have a Montessori Foundation Stage, all staff who

work in it have a Montessori Diploma in addition to the statutory requirements.

- 69% of our school population is entitled to free school meals.
- 67% of the population is an ethnic group other than white.
- There are 45 languages spoken in school.
- 52 % of the school population is learning EAL.
- 20 of our children are asylum seekers and a further 19 are refugees.
- 54% of the population is on the SEN register – of this register 2/3 of of the children show emotional and social needs.
- LAC (Looked After Children) – we have 8 LAC , a further 3 pupils who have CAFCAS involvement, 16 children are subject to a Child Protection Plan, 6 children are subjects of Children in Need meetings and some 151 pupils are monitored on a school Child Protection Log.
- We have 3 children with statements for SEN and a further 5 children currently undergoing statutory assessment.

We employ 22 teachers, all of whom have specific curriculum based responsibilities, one of whom is our Safeguarding Officer. We have 2 members of staff who are training to be teachers and are on the Unqualified Teachers scale. We employ a further Unqualified teacher who has an EAL specialism. Of the 22 teachers, 2 provide cover for absence and staff development and 2 are target teachers working in KS2. We employ 3 musicians, a School Counsellor (4 days), a therapeutic horticulturalist (1 day) and a play therapist (2 days). We also employ 10 teaching assistants, who also have specific teaching responsibilities. We have 4 Learning Mentors, 2 of whom work on attendance. We also have a Roma Liaison Worker due to the high number of our Roma cohort of pupils. The school has a cleaning and maintenance staff of 5, 7 lunchtime organisers and an administrative staff of 3.

### **Why did we choose Montessori?**

Characteristics of the school's context make it unique – there are only a few statistically similar schools in the country and all of them are in places of high socio economic deprivation. The high mobility rates of international new arrivals and the high incidence within that group of children learning EAL, the predictable levels of SEN (between 20 and 30% in any given year group) and the high mobility of other pupil groups into school (those who are not international new arrivals or learning EAL) have been part of the school's make-up for a decade.

Montessori is a system that can meet the needs of these vulnerable pupil groups. Children can enter the school at any point in the year and receive a consistent approach to learning. This approach meets individual needs through the classroom environment as well as through the skill and knowledge of the teacher.

The children who enter school in Nursery and stay with us until the end of KS2, the 'stable' pupil group present with skills levels that are well below the nationally expected standards for 3 year olds – some 18 months behind. A high proportion of children present with significant behavioural difficulties as a result of poor early nurture and social and economic issues in the family home. These sibling groups form two thirds of the school's SEN Register. In fact, 55% of children live with one or more significant social issue.

The Montessori approach promotes pro-social behaviour. It complements our emotional skills education and encourages children to persevere, take risks and feel what it is like to be motivated. Most importantly, it promotes independence of thought and action in children.

The Montessori approach is our strongest and most effective school improvement strategy. This is evidenced in the latest Foundation Stage Profile. The most significant aspect of this system has been the long-term influence on children's motivation and curiosity.

### **How well has this worked?**

School staff already understood the importance of emotional skills development before we introduced the Montessori system to our Nursery and Reception classrooms. There was a commitment to inclusion and belief that every child mattered long before this became a government mantra. These shared values meant the ideas of Montessori sounded familiar to the staff team so there was no resistance to training and the changes this would initiate across school. Five years on and the staff team are asking for more and more Montessori training.

### **How have we trained staff and how has Montessori developed in school?**

The first year we trained all Nursery and Reception staff, teachers and TAs. The following year we finessed this training and the team completed either the diploma or certificate.

After this in 2007/8 we trained Y1 teachers and TAs. The year after Y2 staff and TAs. We also trained two members of staff to train so that

training is in-house. We continue to have a mentoring relationship with the Montessori Training College until our trainers feel ready to go it alone.

The plan is that each year another year group of teachers will be trained to use the materials and philosophy. This year our Montessori trainers are running a series of sessions about Montessori philosophy for the whole staff team. These are a support for the step changes in teaching and learning that we are implementing in KS2. These step changes are Montessorian in character and involve changes to the classroom environment, the development of learning opportunities and the role of the teacher in these learning opportunities.

### **What do governors think and feel about Montessori in school?**

Governors were keen that risk assessments were conducted before we started this project. Their big question was 'what if it doesn't work?' As a group, they are committed to the Montessori approach. They have received regular monitoring updates since we began using Montessori ideas and equipment.

They have witnessed the effects of this way of working on teachers and children and have also heard the opinions of parents. Parents whose children attended school before this was our way of working and whose children attend school now report very different experiences. In every case, they report that the children who have received a Montessori education are more independent in thought and action at home as well as school and that their skills in reading, writing and maths are more advanced than older siblings were at the same age.

The long-term effect of Montessori on children who transfer to KS1 is good – they maintain their achievement and score appropriately at the end of KS1 tests, i.e. the children who stay with us from Reception achieve more than two levels of progress and national average results in English and Maths. Most significantly, the present Y3 children have not experienced the drastic dip that can often occur. They have more than adequately managed the transition from Y2 to Y3. This was also true of the current Y4 children who received only a year of Montessori education before moving to KS1.

### **What is teaching and learning like at Gorton Mount?**

In 2005, teaching and learning on the whole was deemed satisfactory across the school. Provision in and delivery of lessons was better in the early years and KS1. In KS2 pupil skill levels were poor especially in those children who joined school mid-year.

There were very good practitioners in every age phase. There were two outstanding teachers in KS2. There were too many satisfactory practitioners across school. Practice was characterised by exposition that took too long and did not engage children, differentiation was inconsistent from one year group to another. Learning opportunities were dull and children were contained rather than allowed to explore ideas. Skills development was not at the core of activities presented to children.

We still have some satisfactory teaching, however, it is now limited to three teachers.

### **What was the effect on teachers and teaching assistants?**

Teachers and teaching assistants have been revitalised by their own learning about Montessori. They have re-thought many institutionalised habits and changed them. They have become more expert in their assessment of a child's need and in providing a relevant classroom experience for all children. They think differently because their understanding of child development and learning has improved.

They all say they are better teachers now than they were before. Their increased confidence levels are almost visible. They have all developed a forensic approach to planning and delivery of learning – they diagnose need, they use observation to guide them and they trust the child to show them what s/he needs to do next. They have a clearer idea of what being a teacher means. They concentrate on the skills development of individuals.

Many members of staff are asking for Montessori training as it is clear which practitioners are Montessorians and their practice is clearly of a different quality than non-trained members of staff.

### **What does Montessori mean to teachers at Gorton Mount?**

During a recent survey of the 20 teachers and TAs who have undertaken Montessori training the following views and attitudes to their work with children were expressed:

They recognised the implicit links between Montessori and emotional skills being fostered at Gorton Mount: i.e. risk taking, perseverance, learning from errors, sharing, motivation and independence.

They all agreed that they have become better teachers because:

- they have a more systematic, organised approach to their planning and teaching
- have recognised the value of peer learning
- have come to recognise observation as a valuable tool for getting to know children and understand their needs
- have come to appreciate children's independence
- have valued opportunities for one to one teaching

They have also recognised the challenges which the Montessori approach brought:

- introducing Montessori activities to the older children
- re-organising the learning environment to encourage independence and peer learning
- trusting the children in being the leaders of their learning

All the teachers commented on improvements in children's socialisations and behaviours for learning. They spoke of children:

- being more active with greater opportunities to interact
- learning in a calmer atmosphere and smaller groups
- settling to work more quickly and staying on task
- taking more risks in their learning
- being excited about their learning
- showing inquisitiveness, purpose, concentration

### **What does Montessori mean to the parents?**

Parents, whose older children have learned at Gorton Mount in the past and currently have younger siblings benefiting from the Montessori approach, were also interviewed and have expressed the following views about their children's learning:

- they try new things and only ask for help when necessary
- they are very creative and methodical in use of resources
- they gain life skills from their Montessori activities
- they are independent and happy to take risk
- they enjoy school

### **What have been some of the obstacles to making Montessori work?**

There has been only one obstacle and that is training teachers to keep up with the demands of children coming through school. Although staff mobility is low, it can still upset the best plans for training. We have kept one teacher who is Montessori trained with the same cohort of children for two years now and these children are achieving well,

compared to previous achievement and against the national average benchmark.

Montessori-trained teachers need room to develop and practise their new skills and this often puts individuals out of their comfort zone. The long term development is good but it can feel chaotic and uncomfortable in the making. Training across the school has to be systematic and organised. We keep a Montessori-trained teacher in each year where children who have experienced Montessori learning have transferred to...the more teachers we train, the easier this has become.

There has been very little staff resistance to training and this is because the ideas of our school ethos are essentially Montessorian and so the ideas explored in training make sense to the trainees. There has been reticence to put radically different ideas about classroom organisation and management into practice and it is this application that has taken the time.

### **What made the introduction and continued commitment to Montessori possible?**

The initial vision and understanding of what Montessori had to offer the school needed to be communicated to all the staff and parents. Following the initial support from the Montessori charity in bringing Montessori to the school with the changes in the learning environment and initial training of staff, the project needed to be sustained.

Without ongoing leadership from the Head this would not have been possible. Combined with the strong ethos of emotional literacy, ongoing programme of play and horticultural therapy and active support for children with English as an additional language and special education needs, school has embedded Montessori into its ethos and practice.

It has become an integral part of the foundation department and key stage 1 and there is a plan for integration of Montessori teaching approaches into key stage 2. This is possible because of the sustained vision of the Head who shares it effectively with the staff. She ensures that ongoing training equips the teachers and their assistants with attitudes and strategies which enable children to become independent enthusiastic learners. The ethos of "unique child" prevails in the school. The success of the Montessori approach is evident in children's achievements but also in the continued support for the approach by all members of staff whose key interest is children's progress and achievement.

## **The Leadership and Management of the Montessori Project 2005 – 2012**

The leadership of this project is the root of it – without the drive behind this, it would have failed at the first set back. Once the idea was established as the main tool for school development with all school stake holders it had to be developed through sound leadership and management skills. This is a case study in how the soft skills of leadership and management were in fact the essential tools for this job. This case study unpacks those skills and the structure of the project in the hope that it can provide a template or guide for other schools who wish to make a change to how they function.

The case study should be prefaced by the fact that we didn't just decide to become a Montessori school and then we did it. The ground for such an idea was made fertile by the introduction of an emotional literacy (EL) curriculum and approach that formed the basis of our behaviour management system. The staff team were trained in this and the application of EL was modelled to them in all areas of school life.

Systems were changed to do this – we opened earlier, parent education started, teachers taught EL in the curriculum, poor behaviour became an indicator that a child was in distress and teachers became creative about how to provide for these children. Emotional development was the precursor to the introduction of Montessori method because emotional skills are implicitly taught and develop naturally through the Montessori approach. We introduced this in 2003 – the scheme we follow is more detailed than SEAL and is integral to every lesson including assembly.

### **The idea and vision for the project**

This came directly from the interest in emotional skills development. Many of our children present with difficulties in self management and self expression and a significant group of children present with poor attachment patterns. On top of this many children who are new to school are also new to the UK and are learning EAL. Other children move around the city depending on when housing is available or what is happening in their family circumstances. The level of transience across school is 38%. These issues were present in every year group – they were our presenting challenges. Our emotional intelligence work meant that we could manage the challenge and teachers could teach. However, learning was sterile and passive and nothing changed – the challenge remained the same.

Montessori is about learning for the pleasure of it. It is about developing the emotional brain and it makes children independent in thought and action. Its focus is on the individual and his or her development and needs

Detailed below are the leadership and management tasks involved in this project. The chart below shows the emotional skills that we needed to implement organisational change at a fundamental level. The need for change had already been agreed by the team through consultation over SDP that occurred in 2003/4.

### Phase 1 – the start 2005

<b>Leadership task and skill</b>	<b>Management task and skill</b>	<b>Development outcome</b>
Persuading senior staff that Montessori is a workable system for our school.	Research Montessori environments and present written info to senior staff.	Interest and curiosity aroused in Montessori. Growing belief that it could work in our setting.
Communicating the idea of change and the benefits in the Montessori system to all stake holders. Creating the buzz of discussion and simultaneously allaying fears about change.	Briefing at staff meetings and GB meetings  Conduct risk assessment for GB – what are all the obstacles to this change.	Staff interested in Montessori.
Use existing relationships in school to promote the project and to create excitement about its possibilities by matching up positive personalities with staff who have more pessimistic outlooks.	Arrange for Foundation Stage staff( teachers and TAs) first and then all other members of school staff to visit local Montessori provision – matching up senior staff with other members of staff by personality and the way they communicate as individuals.	Creation of 'cultural architects' who can motivate others and lead by example.  Raise interest in Montessori further.
Liaise with Montessori	Update GB and staff	

St Nicholas about supporting the idea of state run Montessori provision.	group about this at scheduled meetings.	
Communicate with Montessori St Nicholas about training and funding for the project.	Meet with Montessori team and GB to discuss plan for the way to develop the project.	Funding secured for equipment, changes to the environment and training.
Meet with Montessori training team to establish ethos of the project and ensure that there is an understanding of the school's ethos and needs. Establish ways of working and introduce.	Organise equipment and decoration of classroom environments. Introduce Montessori trainer to Child Protection reporting procedures and organisational custom and practice. Montessori trainer walks Governing Body through a newly set up Montessori classroom and explains equipment. Introduce main Montessori trainer to whole school staff and Foundation Stage staff team and set dates for training.	New equipped classroom environments.  GB are better informed about Montessori method.  Foundation Stage staff begin training.
Consciously boost confidence of TAs and eliminate distinction between TAs and teachers in the FS.	Personal comment given to TAs about their performance from their manager and the HT. 'Walk the floor' daily.	TAs status increases and out put of 1:1 presentations increases.
Attempt to align two different organisational cultures - negotiate involvement of using the press to promote project with Montessori St Nicholas. Renegotiate press release and press	Counter the incorrect factual information in draft press release. Manage the conflict created between two organisations differing agendas. Meet with Montessori trainer to clarify school's agenda for	Press photos taken, web page set up. Agreed press release sent out. Interviews given to national and local press.

involvement. Communicate school ethos about inclusion and confidentiality to Montessori St Nicholas.	change and ethos of inclusion.	
Communicate schools challenges to Montessori trainer. Persuade Montessori trainer to use a less cohesive management style with FS staff. Motivate FS team to rekindle their commitment to the project. Mediate between team and Montessori trainer.	Manage Montessori trainers anxiety about pace of training through meetings and regular check ins.  Meet with team to remind them of why we are changing what we do. Arrange supervision for FS team and trainer with school counsellor.	Staff absentee rate is higher than it has been in 03 years. Staff team showing signs of de motivation and stress.  FS team see big picture and believe in the benefits of Montessori.
Liaise with Montessori St Nicholas about the difficulties with the training programme.	Meet with Montessori trainer to find solution to this problem.	Training programme continues to its conclusion.
Communicate changes to the FS to other members of staff.	Rota for all other members of staff to spend time in the FS to observe Montessori method.	Whole staff team more committed to Montessori philosophy as can see it in operation. FS team explain what they do and so consolidate their own learning.
HMI visit to Foundation Stage.		Judgement = good. Assessment for learning highlighted as particularly good

## Phase 2 – consolidation 2007

<b>Leadership task and skill</b>	<b>Management task and skill</b>	<b>Development outcome</b>
Negotiate further training for FS staff with Montessori training colleague.	Training organised and relationship established with Academic Director of Montessori Training College.	FS staff team study for and are awarded Montessori certificate and diploma.
Sustain training and develop recruitment procedures to sustain our changes.	Increase training budget and make this an annual financial commitment. Add Montessori feel to all job advertisements and recruitment information – use term Montessori and quote Montessori ideas in job advertisements.	Small cohort of teachers and TAs trained every year. A different year group trained each year so that they can change classroom provision the following year, starting with Y1 and ending with Y6.
Create and use another cultural architect to motivate FS team and talk to other members of staff.	Invite one cultural architect to join GB as teacher governor. Promote same cultural architect to lead and manage FS team Move another cultural architect to Y1 to begin change there.	Changes in FS maintained and developed.
Prepare KS1 and 2 for Montessori training and ideas.	Develop assessment for learning across the rest of school so it is as useful as FS assessment.	Assessment for learning in the form of daily evaluations and skills continuum introduced across school.
Development of KS1 as Montessori provision.	Train Y1 teachers in new cohort of trainees.	Y1 teachers are trained and gain Montessori diploma.
Raise profile of Montessori across rest of the staff team.	Move Montessori trained teacher to Y3.	Changes in one KS2 classroom – learning is active and peer teachers are used. Members of staff start

		asking to be trained in Montessori method.
Ofsted inspection.		Judgement of school = good. Judgement of FS = good. Assessment for learning highlighted as particularly good.
Develop long term relationship with Montessori community.	Work with other schools to promote Montessori in the state system.	Mentoring relationship developed between school and Montessori training college.
Maintain momentum of the project by training the next year group.	Y2 teachers training in next cohort of trainees.	Montessori approaches begin to be used in KS2.
Begin to lay seeds of change for the next stage of development i.e. consolidate work in KS1 and introduce Montessori to KS2, through staff meetings (formal) and through showcasing best practice (informal) by talking up and about individual Montessori trained teachers and showing pupil work and by modelling and promoting Montessori principles when talking to children about their work in assembly (formal and implicit).	Exploration days (more active learning opportunities based around a more integrated curriculum) instituted in an effort to make learning more active in KS1 and 2.	Learning more active on those days. Teachers evaluate pupil skills development in pupils on those days. More emphasis on observation – following the child. Exploration days encourage teachers to experiment with learning environments.
Change public face of Gorton Mount.	Change school prospectus, uniform and school signs to reflect Montessori values and ideas. Contribute to Montessori Centenary DVD.	Clear corporate image that promotes our values.
Attach credibility to our Montessori	Montessori accreditation visit to	Montessori accreditation

changes.	the FS.	awarded.
----------	---------	----------

### Phase 3 – development 2009

<b>Leadership task and skill</b>	<b>Management task and skill</b>	<b>Development outcome</b>
Motivate staff team by publicly celebrating achievements amongst colleagues.	Showcase best practice of Montessori trained teachers by talking about it in department, staff and senior team meetings. Using this best practice to improve the practice.	20 staff trained (18 with qualification). Staff mobility and absent rate well below national and local average. Motivation is high and teachers say they are better teachers post training.
Sustain project by building organisational capacity to train staff in the future.	Training to train course completed by two members of staff.	Trainers qualified Trainers training new cohort of trainees – all KS2 practitioners. Montessori training college mentoring trainers. Trainers deliver whole team training through 2009/10.
Step up speed of the change process for KS2.	Frequency of Exploration Days across school increased.	Step changes are faster across school – less exposition and more active learning introduced especially in KS2.
Consolidate changes to KS1.	Change curriculum to better meet pupil skills development monitor achievement levels and pupil books Evaluate effectiveness of changes through measurement of pro social behaviour in pupils as well as increased attainment.	Montessori approach in KS1. Attainment in reading, writing and maths increased at the end of all age phases. Pro social behaviour increased – Thinks sheets and letters home show less extreme behaviour. Fewer fixed term exclusions.
Challenge way we	Use SLT to set vision	Beginnings of

<p>teach in KS2 using exploration days to show how much better achievement and skills development could be like.</p>	<p>and initiate step changes in individual teams. KS2 broken down into two teams to better facilitate this. Use Montessori trained teacher's practice as a model for other KS2 practitioners.</p>	<p>Montessori approach in KS2 involving more active learning experiences.</p>
--	---	---

#### Phase 4 – completion 2012

<b>Leadership task and skill</b>	<b>Management task and skill</b>	<b>Development outcome</b>
<p>Step change programme accelerated re T and L in KS1 and 2.</p>	<p>Training for whole staff team on principles of Montessori FS used as model for the rest of school. Y4 teacher used as a model for good practice.</p>	<p>Montessori approach consistently used in KS 2. Montessori values understood and adhered to.</p>
<p>Talk and demonstrate Montessori principles all the time in formal settings like staff meetings so that newly trained teachers become confident in making further and more radical changes to their own practice.</p>		<p>All teachers Montessori trained.</p>
<p>Review and evaluate changes so far.</p>	<p>Review ethos and school aims and develop a new long term curriculum plan in light of new learning provision.</p>	<p>Montessori curriculum and approach securely in place from N – Y6.</p>

## **What is the future of Montessori at Gorton Mount Primary School?**

The long-term plan has always been to turn our school into a Montessori school where practice and philosophy run from Nursery through to Year 6. This is something that we anticipated would take seven years. Our youngest children are used to environments where they get to work independently. They are used to asking questions and pursuing answers.

Our teaching in KS2 is becoming less exposition led and more comparable to early years. However, we need to adapt our learning environments so that all those learning behaviours implicit in a Montessori environment are incorporated in provision for children from Y3 upwards.

By 2012 all teachers will have been trained in the Montessori method and philosophy. Staff turn-over is manageable because it is small – one teacher last year (2008/9) took maternity leave. There will always be enough Montessori teachers in school at any given time after 2012 for new teachers to be inducted in the Montessori way of working. We have in-house on-site Montessori trainers who can make staff transition manageable.

We would aim to be a fully functioning Montessori school by 2012.

**[www.montessori.org.uk/msa/primary\\_montessori](http://www.montessori.org.uk/msa/primary_montessori)**