



Hills Montessori
Estd. 1979

ANNUAL REPORT 2024



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Introduction

The Hills Montessori School is a community-based Preschool/ Kindergarten located in the leafy Hills District in Sydney. The Hills Montessori Society was established in 1979. Since that time, it has expanded to provide early childhood education and care for children aged 15 months to 6 years. Our classrooms consist of one (1) pre-primary class for children aged 3-6 years who attend five half days a week, three (3) Full Day classes for children aged 3-5 years, five (5) Parent / Toddler sessions for children aged 15 months – 3 years and a Kindergarten class. We also offer Before and After Session care. We are licensed for 90 children per day who attend in an intimate, stimulating setting with qualified, dedicated staff.

The school delivers a program based on the philosophy of Dr Maria Montessori's method of education along with the curriculum of the NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA). The school meets all the requirements to be registered with NESA and we pride ourselves in the wonderful program we offer due to the dedication and longevity of our staff and the commitment of the families attending our school, both past and present.

The Montessori program includes the learning outcomes of the Early Years Learning Framework, the National Quality Standards Education and Care Services National Regulations by ACECQA and the key learning areas stated by NESA.

The 2024 annual report provides information about the programs and performance of Hills Montessori School. It has been written for accountability purposes and is part of our process of self-evaluation, reporting and planning for both the present and future needs of the school.



Mission Statement

We believe a lifelong love of learning is instilled in children through an environment that caters to each child's unique strengths, interests, abilities and potential. To facilitate this, we follow and abide by the principles of Dr Maria Montessori's method to create authentic Montessori programs for children ranging from infants to 6 years old in our community.

Our child centred approach enables children to develop cognitively, socially, emotionally, physically and creatively to become successful, competent, independent and capable individuals. We believe in establishing peaceful and aesthetically pleasing prepared environments using our philosophy expertise and genuine Montessori materials. This enables children to develop their critical thinking skills, problem solving abilities, build self-esteem and grow pro-social and emotional intelligence that will prepare them for future learning and life success. We recognise the rights of each child and actively deliver inclusive programs for all.

As teachers we observe and interpret children's experiences and use assessment practices to plan for and present Montessori lessons based upon individual learning styles, strengths and dispositions. Our experienced, dedicated and loyal teachers hold both Montessori and Early Childhood qualifications and continually update their professional knowledge, proficiency and skills.

We embrace the sociocultural values of our families and affirm the rich diversity of our community. Strong partnerships with families are made through open communication and information sharing which further enhances children's learning and achievement. Families endorse our efforts to actively transition children smoothly as they progress between age-appropriate programs.

We acknowledge the Dharug people as the traditional custodians of our local area and show respect for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island communities by embedding their cultural heritage and customs into our program and professional practice to teach children Indigenous perspectives and our shared history.

Our natural outdoor learning environments afford children the capacity to grow their understanding of sustainability, with our many interconnected living systems, and by engaging in the care for the environment through practical life work and scientific exploration. The welcoming open spaces encourage physical activities that promote psychological wellbeing and a healthy lifestyle. We view the outdoor environment as an extension to the indoor classroom and a classroom of its own right.

Faculty and staff understand high quality early childhood education promotes superior educational outcomes for children. Our national 'exceeding excellence' rating is underpinned by embracing best practice and adhering to the high standards set by three official governing bodies, making us unique leaders in our field.



President's Report

On behalf of the School Board, it is with great pleasure that we present the 2024 Annual Report, offering insights and perspectives on the functioning of our school during the 2024 school year. 2024 was one of growth, reflection, and transformation, as we continued to navigate the ever-changing landscape of early childhood education. Our community remains a source of strength, and our collective efforts have ensured that we stay true to our values, embrace innovation, and continue to provide an outstanding Montessori education to all our students.

In 2024, I was particularly proud to see our school's achievements and the expertise of our staff recognised at the Hills Shire Local Business Awards, where we were a finalist for the 2024 Most Outstanding Early Childhood Centre award. The entire team at Hills Montessori and I are grateful for this warm acknowledgment of the high quality of our educational program and the inclusive community we have grown here at Hills Montessori.

This achievement has helped me reflect on the strengths of our school and the challenges we may face moving into the future. Our School Board and all staff members meet annually, at our Strategic Planning Day to discuss issues we are facing and ways these can be overcome. It is a day to reflect on what we do well, discuss the future needs of the school and plan for how this can be achieved moving forward. In surveys, parents told us that the professionalism and teaching style of our staff was our greatest strength. My warm thanks to our staff for their expertise, dedication and commitment to continual improvement. Parents also told us they valued the environment and education tools their children were learning with, and the philosophy and values of our school. These strengths create the secret to how we support the individual needs of children, instil a lifelong love of learning and grow the skills children need to thrive.

One of the key responsibilities of the School Board is to ensure the financial stability of the school. In 2024, we continued to manage the school's finances cautiously, ensuring that we balanced the needs of the school with the available resources. Thanks to careful financial management, the school is in a stable and sustainable financial position.

Looking ahead, we are committed to maintaining financial stability while also planning for future growth. As we continue to enhance the quality of education we provide, we are mindful of keeping tuition fees affordable for families, while ensuring the financial sustainability of the school.

I would like to thank our parents, who year after year strengthen this community with their engagement and dedication. As well as participating in working bees and social events. We invite parents to be part of our decision making and our educational program. We include parents and our Head of School as members of our School Board, as well as consulting with our teachers at each board meeting to continually improve our school for our students. At our educational evenings, we also make time to help our parents understand the educational principles of the Montessori Philosophy and how to apply them in their homes.

My warm thanks to our staff, School Board, parents and local community for their support in our mission to give every child the best opportunities to learn and be themselves, at school and at home.

We were proud
finalists
for **2024 Most
Outstanding Early
Childhood Centre
award** at the Hills
Shire Local
Business Awards.



Head of School's Report

As we close the chapter on 2024, I am filled with pride and gratitude for all that we have accomplished together. 2024 has been a testament to the strength of our community, the dedication of our staff and the wonder and potential of the children in our care.

A Year of Growth and Connection

2024 has been a year of steady growth – not just in numbers but in spirit. Our enrolments remained strong, and we welcomed new families who have enriched our community. More importantly, we witnessed our children flourish across all domains of development. From their first tentative steps into independence to confidently leading their own learning, our preschoolers have demonstrated the true essence of Montessori Education. Our annual Strategic Planning Day allows staff and School Board to come together for a common goal – strengthening our school and community for all children and families. It is at this day that

we are determined to ensure Hills Montessori School remains a prominent feature in the early childhood education and care field.

Educational Highlights

Our focus this year remained on maintaining a carefully prepared environment that fosters independence, concentration and respect. The continuation of our wellbeing sessions with a stronger focus on grace and courtesy lessons continued to ensure that all children understand how we respect each other and our beautiful learning environment both indoors and outdoors. Our calendar was filled with multicultural events and traditions including a visit from a local indigenous group who shared their wisdom with all of us. This helps the children to develop a sense of global citizenship and respect for diversity. Through the Montessori methods and specially designed materials, children engaged in foundational experiences that will support their long-term academic success.

Staff and Professional Development

I am incredibly proud of our team. This year our teachers and educators participated in several learning opportunities, including child protection refresher courses, workshops in inclusive education, the updated EYLF V2.0 framework, and deepening our Montessori philosophy by attending the Combined Montessori professional development day. Their passion and professionalism continue to shape the high quality of care and education we provide.

Community and Family Engagement

At Hills Montessori, families are our partners. In 2024 we celebrated a huge milestone, our 45th Anniversary. Our families both past and present came together, and it was during this celebration that we are reminded that it truly takes a village. We also hosted regular parent education evenings on topics like “Understanding the Child’s Learning Environment” and “How vision can affect your child’s learning”.

Challenges and Reflections

Like many early childhood services, we navigated staffing pressures and the ever-changing landscape of early childhood regulations. Through it all, we remained committed to our quality and consistency. We embarked on the Genuine Montessori Pathways and through reflective practices and collaboration it has helped us respond thoughtfully and with resilience to stay on the pathway of providing an authentic Montessori learning environment for all involved with the school.

Looking Ahead

As we look towards 2025, we would like to ensure that our learning spaces are filled with high quality and aesthetically pleasing equipment to enhance the children’s learning. We want to deepen our inclusion practices to support every child’s unique needs and to continually strengthen partnerships with local schools to ensure a smooth transition to primary education.

In closing, thank you to each child who brought joy and curiosity into our space, to every parent who placed their trust in us, to the School Board for their ongoing support and to our devoted team who live out the Montessori principles every day. Together, we are not just preparing children for school – we are preparing them for life.

Kylee Paddy

B.Ed. (ECE) Macquarie University
AMI 3-6 Montessori Diploma AMTEF



Philosophy & Program

The Hills Montessori School follows the Montessori Philosophy, providing an environment that is best suited to the development of the child through the basic principles of freedom of choice, independence, individual learning, and discipline from within the child which are an integral part of the child's experience.

This philosophy is based on the knowledge that a child growing in an atmosphere of respect and understanding for each other and the natural world will develop those values into adulthood.

It is our understanding of the sensitive periods that occur during the development of the child which guides staff to introduce materials and activities that are best suited to the child at the time. The child is then able to best utilise the materials to provide the challenge to maintain their interest with sufficient opportunity for success to encourage their confidence and self-esteem.

Our peaceful environment and compassionate staff nurture respect for self and others, foster a strong sense of community, and stimulate independent thinking. Students carry with them a solid record of academic achievement, a belief in the dignity of work, and a sense of responsibility for their own development as happy and productive human beings.

This environment is designed to foster the natural development process for the child, providing stimulus and freedom to explore according to their changing developmental stages. We understand that children have a natural love and curiosity for knowledge and through their own exploration and discovery, utilise their imagination and creativity. The child will internalise that knowledge, understanding and skills required to ascertain their place and contribution to the world and humanity.

Specially designed equipment provides the child with the freedom to explore concepts and attributes at their own pace and according to their needs and particular skills. They offer the child beauty, exactness, and opportunity to further develop and understand concepts and acquire skills in a sequenced order.

Due to the complexity of the curriculum, key learning areas regularly overlap due to themes, projects or learning processes involved. While the child is introduced to skills and concepts on an individual basis, these are slowly built upon and developed to allow the child to be able to call on an increasing range of skills and information in dealing with the activities and learning experiences in a collaborative and co-operative community.

While each child has a specific program as an individual, it is based on a general program which is found in each teacher's curriculum album. These have been written up during training and added to during in-service courses taken later.

The materials are specifically designed to represent concepts and information in concrete form, enabling the child to interact directly, allowing him/her to develop skills, understand concepts and explore alternatives as an individual or with a small group.

Children are not limited to timed work schedules except by the schools operating hours. Children who require further time to understand concepts or develop skills have that available, within the constraints of the operating hours, along with any assistance they may require. Those children who grasp and understand the concept or information quickly are allowed and provided with materials to move on. It is understood that most children are not likely to have strengths in all areas of the curriculum and the flexibility of time allows the child to work on the weaker areas as needed. This means that each child has their own individual program and work schedule according to their needs.

The child has the opportunity to develop qualities of self-esteem, self-reliance, self-direction, self-discipline, and independence and to build the habit of concentration, research and orderly work pattern.

The Montessori Method also fosters a social awareness and responsibility in children. The three-year cycle for pre-primary and the integration of additional needs children offer a microcosm of society within which children have the opportunity to develop skills essential for interacting in the wider community. This environment promotes individuality, independence, interdependence, awareness of and consideration for the needs of other human beings, which leads to an appreciation of life.

The Hills Montessori School actively encourages the child to appreciate and contribute to the care and conservation of the environment creating an approach of sustainable and ecological practices.

Our School

Hills Montessori Society

The Hills Montessori School is managed by the Hills Montessori Society, a public company limited by guarantee and a non-profit organisation. The society is regulated by the Corporations Act and is endorsed to access the following tax concessions – GST concession, Fringe benefit Rebate, income tax exemption and payroll tax exemption.

Each family with a student at the school is required to be a member of the Society. A Board of directors administers the Society. The Board is elected by the members of the Society at the Annual General meeting held in April each year.

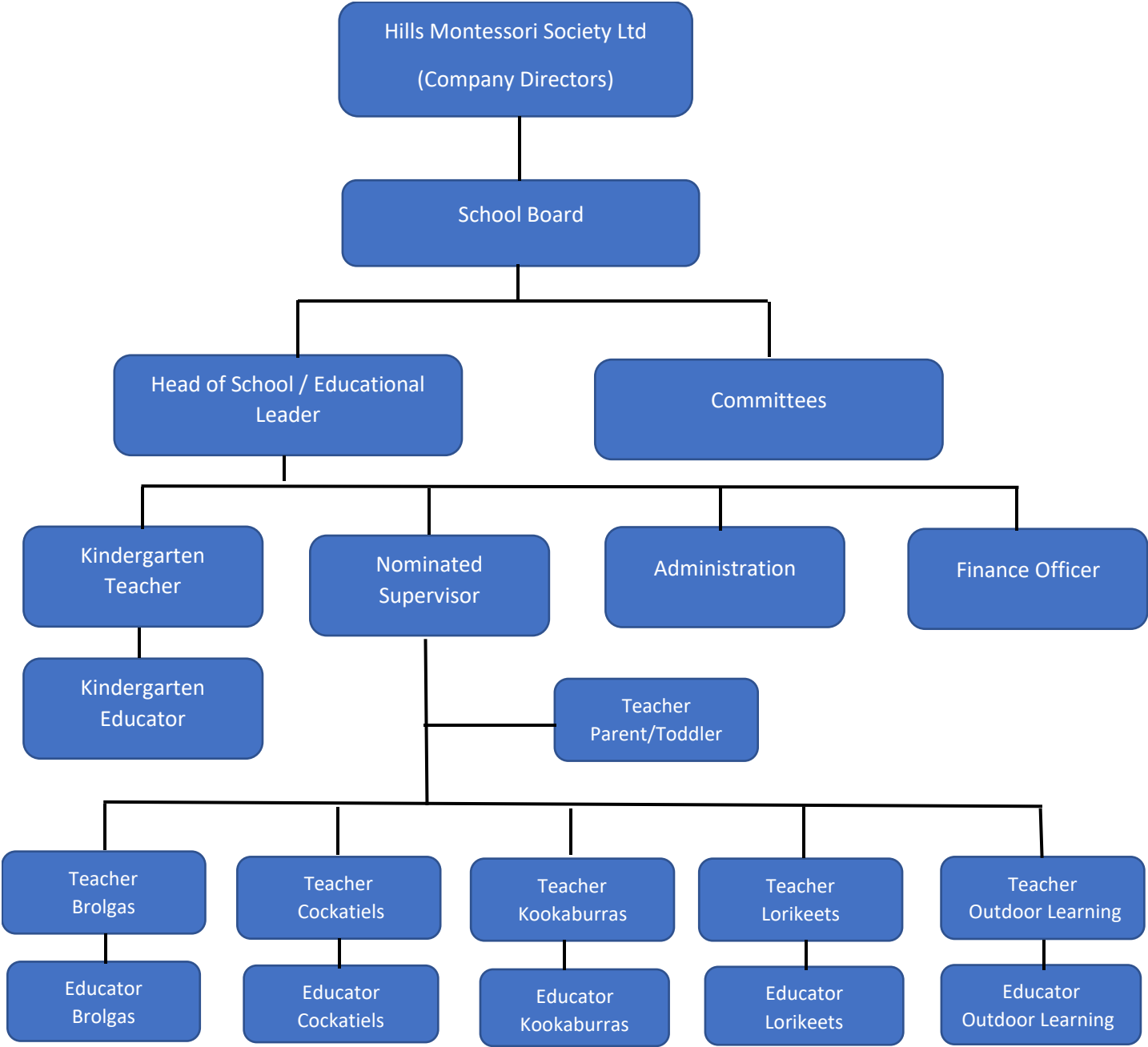
The Organisational Structure is the basis for the operation of our high-quality Montessori Early Childhood Education and Care program. Our programs operate under a clear structure of accountable persons, known as the School Board (Board of Directors).

The School Board consists of a minimum of 6 Board Members, four are Society Members and are usually parents of current students and two of which are employees: Head of School & Treasurer / Finance Officer.

School Board

Position	Board Member	Qualifications	Years of Service
President	Jennifer Rufati	Bachelor of Commerce Masters in Management GAICD – Company Director	10
Secretary	Lauren Peacock	Bachelor of Business Diploma of Counselling Advanced Diploma of Community Sector Management	1
Treasurer	Joanne Blissenden	Bachelor of Economics (Major in Accounting) Certified Practising Accountant	14
Marketing	Mathurica Kumar	Bachelor of Commerce-Majoring in Accounting	1
Social Officer	Helani Sarath Kumar	Entrepreneur in the fashion industry	2
Head of School	Kylee Paddy	Bachelor of Education (Early Childhood Education) Montessori Diploma (Association Montessori Internationale)	12

Organisational Structure



School Performance

Our annual Strategic Planning Day is very beneficial as it brings the School Board and staff together to discuss the school's current Strengths, Weaknesses, Outcomes and Threats. As a team we put in place processes to improve and strengthen the viability of our school.

As a result from our Parent Surveys these items continue to be identified as the strengths of the school:

- 90% of our enrolments are from word of mouth
- Most families believe our school exceeded or met their expectations

Commitment to the children

- Staff are professional in their conduct
- Student's outcomes were either exceeding or met with expectations
- Unique environment
- Quality and longevity of staff
- Holistic approach to teaching
- Class size
- Adherence to the traditional Montessori philosophy
- Outdoor facilities
- Excellent communication

Most families believe our school exceeded or met their expectations.

Considerations for the following year are:

- Provide greater opportunities for parents and families to connect
- Information nights covering a variety of topics including Montessori philosophy and program both at school and at home
- Continue to improve the outdoor environment

Our school performance and future goals are included in our Quality Improvement Plan and is available for viewing in the school office.

Parent Involvement

The school is a community-managed school. Each family is a member of the Association managing the school and therefore has the ability and opportunity to participate in its running with one vote per family for General meetings and the opportunity to stand on the Board. Other opportunities for parents to be involved in the school including Class Parents, Working Bees, classroom craft or cooking, Open Days, social events and admin support.

Social Events held in 2024 were:

- Disco for the students
- Mini Carnival to celebrate our 45th Anniversary

Community Events

School events help to develop the community and allow parents and staff to get to know each other a little more. It is wonderful to see everyone participating and enjoying the opportunity to be together to celebrate each event.

Throughout the year the school hosts a range of courses, workshops and information sessions.

Information sessions that we offered to current families were:

- Introduction to our classrooms for new parents
- Kindergarten Information Evening
- Open Classrooms
- Harmony Day
- Book Week

Events offered to prospective parents:

- Classroom tours
- Annual Open Day

Included in our school community projects is our annual fundraiser to raise funds for a nominated charity. This year the charities we supported were for the K-Mart Wishing Tree and the Coast Shelter. The Coast Shelter collects goods for Christmas hampers for the homeless. Our strong community spirit showed in the generous financial support and donations of goods collected to help others less fortunate.

Our Staff

Qualifications & Composition

The School's workforce - 21 staff.

Number of staff with the following qualifications:	
Bachelor of Education / Teaching	6
Proficient Teachers as per the Teacher Accreditation	5
Diploma in Early childhood	5
Certificate III in Children's Services	8
Diploma of Montessori (3-6)	8
Montessori Assistants Certificate	4
Bachelor of Economics	1
Bachelor of Commerce	1

- ❖ Composition of teacher's qualifications;
 - 6 trained teachers,
 - o one combining the Head of School and

Educational Leader

- ❖ one combining the role of Nominated supervisor and classroom teacher
- ❖ four teaching in the pre-school classrooms
- ❖ 11 Childcare trained educators
- ❖ 4 administrative staff composed of the Head of School, Administrative Officer, Finance Officer and Enrolment /Marketing Officer.

Composition of languages spoken by staff:

- ❖ 100% of staff speak English
- ❖ 67% are from an English-speaking background
- ❖ 33% have Korean, Arabic, Palestine, Cantonese, Urdu/Sinhalese, Filipino backgrounds.
- ❖ 100% of staff are female

The average age of our staff is 48 years with the average employment at Hills of 8.9 years.

All of our staff have completed the Working with Children Check upon appointment and hold a current first aid and CPR certificate. All teaching staff undertake annual Child Protection training. Staff attendance has been excellent due to a healthy environment created by adhering to our Work Health and Safety policies and the love of working in a Montessori environment. Long term staff employees ensure a great stability with the children and the overall program.

Professional Development

Hills Montessori encourages and supports Professional learning amongst its staff.

This is supported through staff meetings held every 3 weeks, where discussions cover Mental Health and Wellbeing, Work Health and Safety, administration necessities, and curriculum and policy development. In addition, staff are required to attend workshops, conferences, seminars and other school observations.

The school has a Staff Training Policy that ensures our annual budget includes funding to cover ongoing staff development to allow staff to retain up to date training in all areas. Five pupil free days are allocated each year to each staff member to enable them to attend workshops and allowing additional professional development training during the year as required.

Total number of hours of professional development during 2024 was 446 hours – an average of 22 hours per staff member.

Our Students

Attendance

The Hills Montessori School is committed to working with parents to ensure that all children enrolled attend regularly. While children will occasionally be absent, regular non-attendance is disruptive both to the individual and the workings of the class and may result in difficulties for the child in their ongoing development. Where there are genuine reasons for non-attendance on a long-term basis, the school will work with parents to ensure that the child's education is continued during that time. The school's staff overarching concern is for the welfare of children. Parents are encouraged to show their commitment to the value of education by ensuring their child's regular and ongoing attendance at school.

The school actively discourages taking children out of school during term time for family holidays during their third year of attendance because of the disruption that it causes to the education of individuals and class groups. However, it is helpful for staff to know of such absences in advance and upon parental request offer advice on projects that the child can undertake while on holiday to complement the classroom program.

Process for Noting Absent Days

1. Parents are asked to ring the school in the morning if their child is going to be absent for the day or for a period of time. Phone messages and emails are passed onto the relevant teacher. Phone messages taken by staff from a parent must fill out an Admin. Absent Form for the day but still requires a signed note from the parent.
2. Otherwise, parents must produce a written note explaining their absence on the child's return. Forms are available to fill in at the school if necessary.
3. Contact is made with the parent if a child returns without a written explanation. Notification of absences is placed in the child's file and kept for a minimum of 7 years after the child leaves the school.
4. Parents of children who are absent for more than 3 days without explanation will receive a phone call from the Head of School. In the event a child is regularly absent, an interview will be organised with the parents to determine how to assist the child to attend on a more regular basis or the child's development while away from school.

Parents of school aged children are reminded of their legal obligation to ensure their child's attendance at school.

Attendance Records

1. A record of attendance is maintained each day.
2. An enrolment register is kept with the following information:
 - Name of child, age, address
 - The name and contact telephone number of parent(s)/guardian(s)
 - Date of enrolment and, where appropriate, the date of leaving the school and the student's destination
 - For students who have transferred from another school: the previous school or pre-enrolment situation
 - For students leaving The Hills Montessori School: the next school they will be attending
3. Where the destination of a student above 6 years is unknown, evidence that a Department of Education and Training Officer with home school liaison responsibilities has been notified of the student's name, age and last known address. Rolls are marked daily. All absentee notes must be signed and dated by the parent. At the end of each year, the rolls and notes are collected by the school secretary and stored in the archives. These are kept for a minimum of seven (7) years as prescribed by the Education Act and Department of Education and Communities Regulations.

Enrolment Composition 2024

Students	Kindergarten - 16		Pre-school - 126		Parent/Toddler - 28
Females	25%		50%		21%
Males	75%		50%		79%
Indigenous	0%		1%		0%
CALD	56%		85%		79%
Additional Needs	1%		7%		0%

Student testing

Our students are not required to be state or nationally tested.

In house testing occurs on an individual and ongoing basis to indicate what knowledge has been acquired and determining the program for future learning. Children are encouraged to look at their progress and compare their work with a view towards improving their skills and knowledge as an open-ended development.

Excursions

Our Kindergarten class partake in a variety of excursions and on-site visits during the year which included:

- Walk to the local park for Road Safety and gross motor activities
- Riverside Theatre to enjoy “Gruffalo’s Child”
- Taronga Zoo
- Sydney Botanical Gardens on public transport
- Bus to local K-Mart to donate gifts to the Wishing Tree

On-Site Visits

- High Tea for parents
- Life Education
- Dental Nurse
- NSW Health to undertake eye testing for 4-year-olds
- Art classes
- Drumming classes

Communication

Parent communication of the child’s development as well as school events is offered in the following ways:

- Child Portfolios available at any time for parents to look at digitally and a copy is given when the child is leaving
- Parent/teacher conferences formally twice a year. Additional conferences can be arranged on request.
- A newsletter is emailed out each term with updates and class news
- Posters on activities or events are placed up regularly in the sign in area and shared in our Storypark app.
- Sharing of information on the Storypark app, Facebook and the school website
- Opportunity for daily conversation with teachers
- Photos from each class are regularly posted on the Storypark app
- Information nights held once each term to provide extensive information and understanding on child development, family relationships and the materials and activities of the program
- Opportunities to join the child in the class environment twice a year

Our Premises

Maintenance of the Hills Montessori School premises is critical as it provides both a safe environment for the children to grow and learn as well as being a warm and fun place for them to socialise.

This is supported by the strong support of the working bees that are held four times a year with parents, children and staff. The working bees focus on minor maintenance jobs and where possible, major projects for the school.

The Family Participation Program requires families to contribute a minimum number of hours to assist with maintenance of the school, the development of program activities and administration. This assists in keeping fees to a minimum as well as developing the community of the school.

School Policies

We have all relevant school policies as required by NESA and Department of Education. These policies assist in maintaining a safe and inclusive environment, an ever developing and high-quality program and ensures financial viability for the future.

Our policies ensure that all aspects of the schools' mission, in providing for student's welfare, are implemented. Our school policies are available to view on our school website.

Health and Safety Policies reviewed or developed this year were:

Additional Needs	Administration of First Aid	Administration of Medicine
Anaphylaxis	Anti-Bullying	Arrival & Departure
Asthma	Attendance and Absence	Behaviour Guidance
Child Access	Child Protection	Child Safe Environment
Death of a Student, Staff or Visitor	Diabetes Management	Emergency Management
Epilepsy Management	Handwashing	Immunisation
Incident, Injury & Illness	Infectious Diseases	Interactions With Children
Maintenance of Premises	Medical Conditions	Mental Health and Wellbeing
Missing Child	Nutrition and Meals	Pastoral Care
Risk Management	Safe Food Handling	Sickness
Sleep and Rest	Sun Protection	Water Safety

Enrolment Policy

Most of our students commence in our pre-school when they are 3 years of age. Prior to commencement parents are invited to observe a classroom and attend our annual Open Day in March. Parents of the students are invited to a New Parent Information evening in November. At this evening staff explain the school procedures and how to prepare their child for pre-school. Parents are also provided with a handbook, which includes all school policies and procedures. A probation period exists for the first term of the child's commencement to enable a child to withdraw without financial loss. A withdrawal is agreed upon by both staff and parents and is a very rare occurrence.

Students are invited to continue into our Early Stage 1 (Kindergarten) class the year they turn 5 before the 1st August. From here children transfer to a Montessori Primary school or move into local public or private schools. There are no entrance exams into either the pre-school or the ES1 (Kindergarten) class. Enrolment requirements are as per our Enrolment Policies.

Parents have the opportunity to enrol their child for 3 years at Montessori. If the age of the child allows, children attend the kindergarten group then move into Year 1 at the next school.

The school's policy on enrolment acknowledges the rationale and requirements of current legislation. It combines this with the processes of enrolment and responsibility for student welfare established in the school already. In particular it is the policy of the school that Hills Montessori School adheres to the legislated acts of the Anti-Discrimination Act (NSW); the Disabilities Act (1992); Occupational Health and Safety Act (NSW) 2000 and the NSW Commission for Children and Young People Act 2000.

The school admits students of any race, gender, religion, national and ethnic origin in line with Montessori learning and philosophy. We are proud to have such a diverse mix of people in our school community. All enrolments are considered individually, based upon the Montessori classroom environment, the existing number of children, and staffing.

Offers of enrolment begin in June each year with general conclusion in November followed by an orientation evening for parents on school policy and procedures as well as administration of starting dates.

New children to the school start in small groups allowing opportunity for staff to assist with the transition into the school. Admission of children usually occurs over a number of weeks in Term 1 of each year and intermittently through the year as vacancies arise.

Child Protection Statement

Hills Montessori School takes the welfare of students very seriously and has policies and procedures in place that guide the school in meeting its obligation around child protection. Our Child Protection Policy states that the safety and wellbeing of all students are of fundamental importance to Hills Montessori School. All staff and the school have a range of different obligations relating to the safety, protection and welfare of students including:

- A duty of care to ensure reasonable steps are taken to prevent harm to students:
- Obligations under child protection legislation; and
- Obligations under work health and safety legislation.

The purpose of this Policy is to summarise the obligations imposed by child protection legislation on the school and on employees, contractors and volunteers at the school and to provide guidelines as to how the school will deal with certain matters.

Child Protection is a community responsibility. The school's policy clearly details the responsibility the school has in the areas of Mandatory reporting obligations, the identification and reporting of reportable conduct and the requirements for all employees to have clearance in the area of Working with Children Checks.

We are also dedicated to ensuring the school becomes and child safe organisation that creates, adopts strategies and acts to prevent harm to children, including sexual abuse. We are creating an organisation that creates conditions to reduce the likelihood of children being harmed, conditions that increase the likelihood of identifying and reporting harm and responding appropriately to disclosures, allegations and suspicions of harm.

Details of the full Policy are available from the School Office and on the school's website.

Anti-Bullying Statement

Bullying is an anti-social behaviour that can affect anyone. It is unacceptable at Hills Montessori School because every student has the right to a safe, caring and supportive school environment.

The aim of the Policy is to ensure that Hills Montessori School is a supportive and safe environment. Every member of the Hills Montessori Community has the right to feel safe and protected. They also have the right to experience positive and respectful relationships between all members of the school community. The promotion of this environment is the responsibility of all members of the Hills community. Adults in this community need to be especially aware of their behaviour, as they are the role models for our children. By empowering members of our community, we hope to achieve a safe learning environment that respects and values individual differences.

This policy applies to interactions between:

- Child to child
- Parent to parent
- Parents to child
- Staff member to parent
- Parent to staff member
- Board to parent etc.

Details of the full Policy are available from the School Office and on the school's website.

Grievance Policy

In the event of a grievance the following procedures should be followed:

Throughout the procedures all parties must be made aware of their opportunity to access the Department office ~ Children's Services Advisor – 9202 5330 at any time.

1. A parent should first lodge the complaint either verbally or in writing to the appropriate person related to that concern. e.g. problems regarding fees should be directed to the Finance officer and classroom issues should be directed to the teacher. If it is within that person's capacity to address the matter to the satisfaction of the parent, that person can direct action to avoid recurrence of the problem and report the matter to the Head of School and/or the President. If the complaint is about a person, that person should be informed and solutions discussed.
3. If there is a difficulty in doing this or if the discussions are unsatisfactory or unresolved, the matter should be referred to the Head of School or President by the staff member or parent.
4. If the matter is still unresolved, a meeting will be called between the person/s involved in the concern, the Head of School and the President. Time may be set aside for a meeting to occur without the person around whom the complaint revolves. That person would be given an opportunity later in the above-mentioned meeting or at a later date to present his/her account of the incident.
5. A committee involving the Head of School, President and two other committee members may be contacted if the situation is still considered unsatisfactory.
6. If issues regarding the management of the school that have not been resolved at this level, the parent may wish to call an EGM in accordance with the Hills Montessori Society By-Laws
7. If still unsatisfied with the decision, the complainant may contact the Supervisor at Department of Education and Community Services 9836 9831 or Board of Studies for concerns regarding ES1 students on 9367 8341.
8. The Ombudsman; www.ombo.nsw.gov.au / 02 9286 1000, may be contacted if the complaint is not resolved by communicating through the above channels.

Pastoral Care

The quality of Pastoral Care influences the culture and feeling of the whole school. It creates an atmosphere in which children feel secure, valued and encouraged in their learning, growth and social development. It will inform and reassure parents that their children are being educated in a safe, caring and healthy environment.

Each person is respected and acknowledged as a valuable member of the school community. We seek to establish a relationship and partnership with staff, parents and students which promotes mutual understanding, respect, tolerance and acceptance. Pastoral Care is an approach to education which attempts to value and develop each member of the school community. It addresses the social, cognitive, emotional, spiritual and physical needs of the students so that each child has the opportunity to reach his/her potential and acquire skills to cope with life.

The Montessori principles encourage the child to develop the ability to take responsibility for their own well-being and to care for others. The program allows quality teaching directed to the individual learning needs of the child and providing opportunity for the student to nurture individual growth.

The interest of the child is always our primary concern showing no bias to students with culturally and linguistically diverse or socio-economic backgrounds or special needs.

Staff have the responsibility of fostering quality interpersonal relationships amongst themselves, students, parents and support staff. Staff have a significant role of modelling the importance of building and maintaining relationships which are grounded in mutual respect, dignity, fairness, reconciliation, compassion and justice. Staff are aware of appropriate boundaries within teacher-student and teacher-parent relationships.

Pastoral Care is fully integrated into the school's daily routines and its curriculum. The safety, health and wellbeing of each member of the school community is of paramount importance.

Behaviour Management Statement

"Let us remember that inner discipline is something to come to and not something already present. Our Task is to show the way to discipline. Discipline is born when the child concentrates his attention on some object that attracts him/her not only with the useful exercise but with the control of error." **MARIA MONTESSORI: THE ABSORBENT MIND**

The aim of a Montessori environment is to help each child develop inner self-discipline. This development is fostered by the ordered organisation of the classroom and by the child's freedom to choose and work at an activity without interference. Guidance is given when appropriate.

This approach alleviates many disciplinary problems by helping the child gain skills in self-discipline and mediation within a controlled environment. The mixed age group of each classroom allows the younger children to emulate the more mature behaviour in the environment.

Limits are set for the benefit of the group and each child's individual development. Setting limits helps children to start what is hopefully a lifelong process of feeling secure, orienting themselves in the world, and finding appropriate expression for feelings that are hard to control. Positive reinforcement is used to foster acceptable behaviour, and children are given words to assist them to express their feelings so that they need not resort to physical responses, for example, hitting. Children are encouraged to become independent in their dealing with one another as appropriate to their age. Adult intervention occurs when the situation demands. Children displaying unacceptable behaviour may be required to isolate themselves from their peers in order to reflect on their behaviour. They are free to resume their activity when they feel ready. Behavioural problems may be discussed in the group without referring to the offending child(ren) by name.

If deemed necessary, the parents of a child, who is behaving inappropriately, will be notified and advised of appropriate action. Written records will be kept of incidents of unacceptable behaviour or inactive or withdrawn behaviour, and of conversations and correspondence with the parents. Where a formal meeting is required with the child's parents, they are to be given a set of minutes taken at the meeting. The parents are required to sign the minutes as acknowledgement that the discussion took place along the lines contained therein. In severe or repeated instances, the offender's parents may be advised to seek professional help.

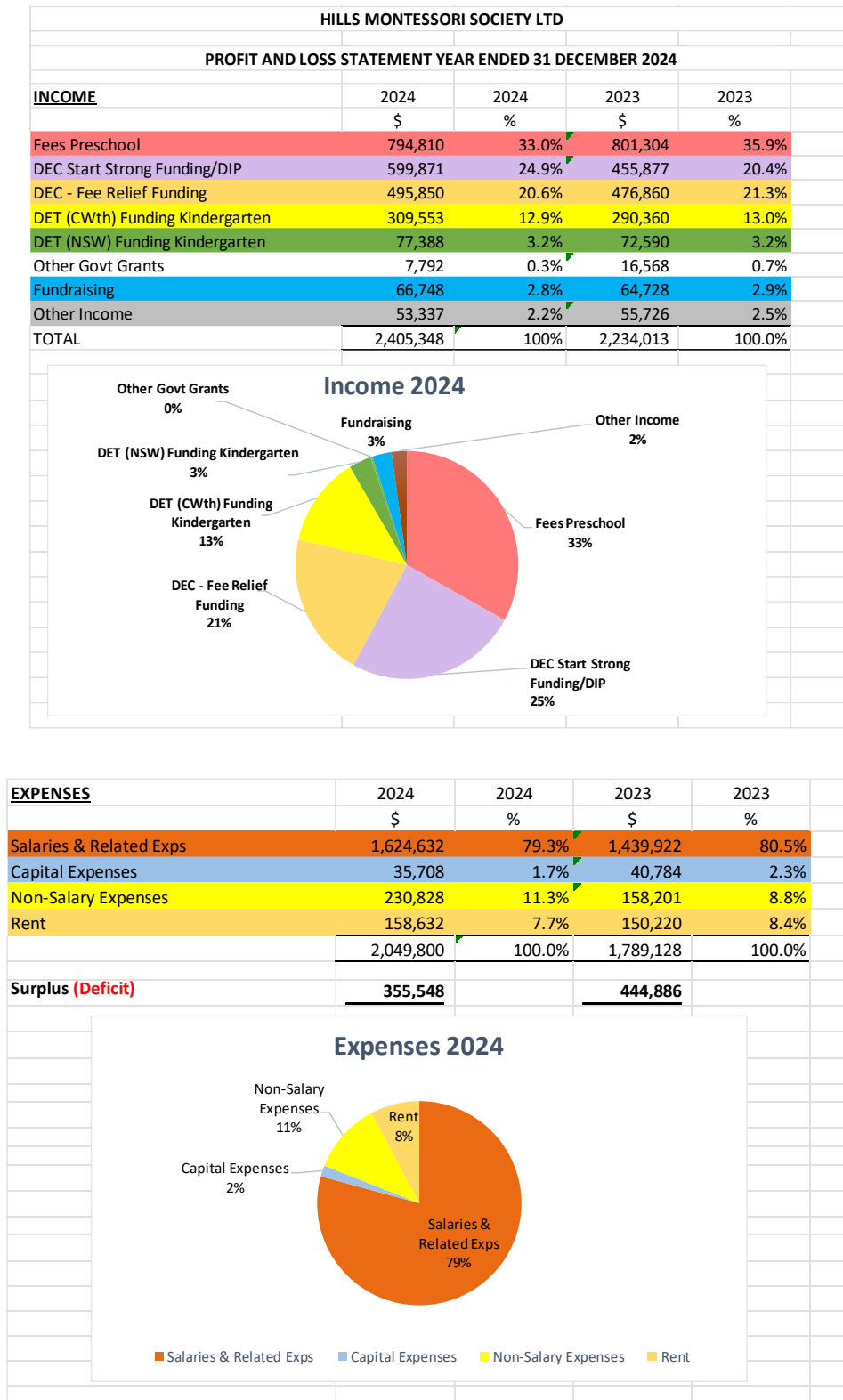
In accordance with the Education Reform Amendment (Corporal Punishment Act 1995), and in keeping with the Montessori philosophy, this School does not permit corporal punishment of students and does not support corporal punishment in any form.

Financials

FINANCIAL REPORT 2024

The School reported a net profit of \$355,548 for the 2024 financial year. Revenue from school tuition fees was minimally increased, a slight decrease as a percentage of income. Government Funding was higher than 2023 by 4.5% and this reflects the Government initiative to promote Early Childhood Education and Learning. DET Fee Relief Funding is deducted directly from School Tuition Fees. Salaries increased as per mandated enterprise agreements and remain approximately 80% of our expenses. We were able to retain all our employees throughout 2024 and employed an additional 2 part time employees. Rent increased by the CPI in 2024 as per our lease agreement. Non-Salary expenses were higher in 2024 reflecting the higher cost of living.

During the year we replaced the flooring in the Hall (3 classrooms) and extended an awning for improved outdoor learning. We were able to update our technology purchasing 11 laptops and 6 ipads for teacher and class usage. We purchased new complete sets of readers for Kindergarten and continued to replace missing or older equipment. An air conditioning unit also had to be replaced.



School Projects

Projects Achieved in 2024

Projects we achieved, other than our Fundraising projects, included:

Children's Environments

- Additional support staff
- Offering wellbeing classes to all students
- Continue to upgrade classroom equipment
- Replace air-conditioning unit in one classroom

Administration

- Celebrated our 45th anniversary
- Integrated computer system
- Upgrade of staff toilets by landlord
- New laptops for teachers and administration
- Re-branded our name
- Created a new website
- Subscribed to an enrolment app to improve on the efficiency of the enrolment process
- Replaced air-conditioning unit in main office

Outdoor Environment

- Extended the outdoor learning environment with an additional awning
- Increased our chicken family

Future Projects

The Hills Montessori School continues to look to developing the school environment for the children and families at the school as well as supporting the local community.

In 2025 we will be focusing on the following projects:

- Cyber safety and AI training for staff
- Continue to offer after school social events for families
- Replace the flooring in classrooms
- Improve on our social media
- Subscribe to an App specific to kindergarten for attendances and record keeping
- Water tank for outdoor environment
- Re-carpet staff room
- Instal air-conditioning units in one classroom and staff room
- Succession Planning for staff retirement
- Theory of Change project

