

Settling-In Policy – Clapham Montessori

We recognise that, for many children starting at Clapham Montessori, this may be the first time that they have been separated from their main carer.

Child’s needs

All children are unique and the amount of time that a child takes to settle can vary enormously. Therefore, children will be given time to settle-in at their own pace, so as to make them feel welcome, safe and confident in this environment.

We will email an ‘Information on Entry’ form for parents to fill in before their child starts with us. The information contained within this form helps us to get to know the likes/dislikes and needs of each individual child and therefore enables us to respond to these, in particular during the settling -in period.

When possible, we invite the new child to come for a 30-minute visit with a parent or carer. During this time there is the opportunity for the child to start to become familiar with the environment, and for the parent to ask any further questions. We invite the parent or carer to sit on a designated chair, while their child is invited to look around and to choose an activity from the environment. This is so that the child begins to interact with the adults and to become familiar with the space, whilst feeling supported by the presence of their parent or carer. Some children prefer to sit with their parent/carer for the duration of the visit, in which case we will seek to interact with them, for example by offering some activities and inviting the child to sit at a table close to their parent/carer, or by engaging in conversation. As above, we take these steps guided by the child’s responses.

These short visits for children starting in the Two-year Old group usually take place outside the regular session times, in order to minimise disruption for the rest of the group. In addition, before the visit, we may arrange a zoom call with the parent/carer in order to clarify any information provided on the forms and to provide a further opportunity to explain the settling-in process and answer any questions.

Visits for children starting in the older group usually take place during a session, so we ask parents to adopt a ‘fly on the wall’ approach and to refrain from walking around the environment or initiating any interaction with the other children.

Before entering the classroom, the parent or carer will be asked to sign the visitors' book. Mobile phones and any other electronic devices should remain out of sight, and not be used during these visits. We may keep these items in a designated place for the duration of the visit.

We endeavour to arrange for only one new child to start per day, so that we can provide the necessary support for her/him.

Children attending the older group are usually dropped-off at the back door, whereas children in the Two-year Old group are accompanied up the front stairs by their parent or carer.

Please say goodbye briefly and let your child know that you will be back later. Some children find it distressing to separate from their parent/carer, and we therefore encourage you to be very brief when saying goodbye. Please rest assured that the directresses are always ready to comfort and reassure your child.

During the first few sessions, we will aim to take a few photos of the child and will also send some notes on how the session went, via our online platform Transparent Classroom. We will engage with the child and offer activities, initially based on the child’s choices during her/his visit, as well as on the information received from parents via the Information on Entry form.

We will of course make sure that the child is shown the loos, if he/she is potty-trained, or in the process of being potty-trained, and we will ask him or her whether he/she needs the loo during the morning, in particular before/after having a snack, and before engaging in water-based activities.

During the first few sessions, the child may leave earlier, but most children adapt to the full 3-hour session within the first few days. We will discuss these steps with parents.

The second or third session is often the hardest for the child. We will therefore be aware that the child may need extra support even if the first session went well.

If after a few sessions the child does not seem to be settling in, we will discuss other options with the parents, such as a ‘little and often’ approach, consisting of daily one-hour sessions for a few days, subject to availability of spaces, and the need to maintain the necessary ratios.

We will involve the new children in small Grace and Courtesy’ groups to help them to adapt to the environment, involving practice in, for example ‘how to ask for help’, ‘how to carry a chair/mat/tray safely’, how to pour a drink at the snack table, etc.

We will observe the new children closely. Staff will look in particular at:

How are they interacting with the other children?

How is their co-ordination?

How is their speech?

What are their movements like?

It is important that parents feel at ease throughout their child’s process of integration into the wider environment of the Montessori Children’s House. Whilst we have many years of experience, we acknowledge the fact that each child is unique and so we are more than happy to discuss any concerns with you to be sure of making the transition from home to the Montessori environment as smooth as possible.