

Report of External Evaluation and Review

Maria Montessori Education
Foundation

Highly Confident in educational performance

Highly Confident in capability in self-assessment

Date of report: 5 May 2015

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Purpose of this Report

The purpose of this external evaluation and review report is to provide a public statement about the Tertiary Education Organisation's (TEO) educational performance and capability in self-assessment. It forms part of the accountability process required by Government to inform investors, the public, students, prospective students, communities, employers, and other interested parties. It is also intended to be used by the TEO itself for quality improvement purposes.

Introduction

1. TEO in context

Name of TEO:	Maria Montessori Education Foundation
Type:	Private training establishment (PTE)
First registered:	23 May 2008
Location:	Kawai Purapura Retreat Centre, 14 Mills Lane, Albany, Auckland
Delivery sites:	Kawai Purapura Retreat Centre
Courses currently delivered:	AMI 3-6 Diploma in Montessori Education (Level 6)
Code of Practice signatory:	Yes – for students aged 18 years and over
Number of students:	In February 2015, Maria Montessori Education Foundation had 13 full-time students and two part-time theory-only students. There are no Māori students, Pasifika students or international students.
Number of staff:	Three part-time contracted staff
Scope of active accreditation:	AMI 3-6 Diploma in Montessori Education (Level 6)
Distinctive characteristics:	Maria Montessori Education Foundation is the only New Zealand organisation affiliated to AMI (Association Montessori Internationale), and therefore the only New Zealand organisation delivering the internationally recognised AMI 3-6 Diploma in Montessori Education.

The course was not delivered between 2011 and 2014. During that time, consultation with stakeholders and the Montessori community resulted in a site change and different structure of delivery to better meet the needs of prospective learners. There is also a reliance on availability of AMI trainers from overseas. The course is now being delivered over three summer blocks, each of eight weeks, to support learners to study while working in the early childhood education sector or completing other qualifications. The course continues to be delivered face-to-face.

Recent significant changes: A change of format for delivery from a modular approach to three summer blocks, with the first delivery across 2015-2017, was approved by NZQA in 2014. A change of venue was also approved for the 2015-2017 delivery.

Previous quality assurance history: The previous NZQA external evaluation and review (EER) of Maria Montessori Education Foundation was conducted in March 2011. The summative statements of confidence were Highly Confident in educational performance and Confident in capability in self-assessment.

External moderation occurs through a visiting external examiner from AMI conducting the final oral and written examinations and providing a report to AMI.

Internal moderation of teaching and assessment occurs through the model of teaching, where the director of teaching comes from overseas to deliver the course along with the assistant, who is a New Zealand Montessori teacher undertaking the AMI Training of Trainers qualification.

2. Scope of external evaluation and review

Following consultation with Maria Montessori Education Foundation management, the focus areas were chosen, and the scope of this EER included the following focus areas.

Governance, management and strategy

This is a mandatory focus area because of its significance to all aspects of an organisation's performance.

AMI 3-6 Diploma in Montessori Education (Level 6)

This programme was selected as a focus area because it is the only approved programme being delivered by the Maria Montessori Education Foundation.

The scope and focus areas were agreed to by the organisation and decisions were based on an internal review of self-assessment and information on the programme currently offered.

3. Conduct of external evaluation and review

All external evaluation and reviews are conducted in accordance with NZQA's published policies and procedures. The methodology used is described fully in the web document Policy and Guidelines for the Conduct of External Evaluation and Review available at: <http://www.nzqa.govt.nz/providers-partners/registration-and-accreditation/external-evaluation-and-review/policy-and-guidelines-eer/introduction>. The TEO has an opportunity to comment on the accuracy of this report, and any submissions received are fully considered by NZQA before finalising the report.

Prior to the EER, the lead evaluator discussed the proposed site visit with the Maria Montessori Education Foundation coordinator to finalise the scope and agenda. A self-assessment summary was supplied in advance of that visit. After the selection of focus areas, and prior to the visit, relevant key documents were supplied to the evaluation team to support the plan of enquiry.

The on-site visit was conducted by a team of two evaluators over two days at the Albany site. Discussions were held with trustees, the director of training, course coordinator, current students and advisory team members. A number of stakeholders were interviewed by telephone – including advisory team members, school owners, a representative of the Montessori Aotearoa New Zealand Council, 2011 graduates, and other childcare professionals.

The organisation supplied a range of documents requested by the evaluators on site to support the evaluative conversations, and these were reviewed by the evaluation team.

Summary of Results

Statement of confidence on educational performance

NZQA is **Highly Confident** in the educational performance of **Maria Montessori Education Foundation**.

Maria Montessori Education Foundation is achieving a high standard of educational performance.

- All learners successfully complete their qualifications and develop the skills and attributes to be Montessori trained teachers. The Montessori community recognises the quality outcomes of internationally recognised AMI qualifications and graduates readily gain employment in New Zealand and overseas. Nine of the 11 graduates from 2011 are currently working in the Montessori early childhood sector, and four are working in centres overseas.
- The AMI teacher training has developed a reputation among the Montessori school community for producing graduates who are reflective practitioners and critical thinkers who share their deep understandings of the child and engagement with learning materials in a collaborative teaching environment. The teaching staff are passionate about their work and learner achievement, and model Montessori values and philosophy throughout the course, which is highly valued by the learners.
- The ongoing and comprehensive engagement with the Montessori community builds strong relationships and promotes professional development for parents, teachers, graduates and other interested childcare professionals. For instance, the AMI Montessori Classroom Assistants Certificate is delivered annually to parents and prospective Montessori teachers, and visiting international AMI trainers undertake speaking engagements in main centres which attract very high attendance.
- The organisation is effectively managed, with a clear strategic purpose and direction to provide a quality AMI teaching qualification within a strongly supportive learning environment. The Montessori community readily provides voluntary support in a range of advisory, management and administrative areas to ensure that the organisational goal is achieved: to meet the identified need of a shortage of trained Montessori teachers both in New Zealand and overseas.

Statement of confidence on capability in self-assessment

NZQA is **Highly Confident** in the capability in self-assessment of **Maria Montessori Education Foundation**.

- Self-assessment at Maria Montessori Education Foundation is ongoing, authentic and transparent, and has led to improvements, although it is too early for the effectiveness of these changes to be fully understood.
- The achievement of learners is being monitored both formally and informally across the face-to-face teaching components and the teaching practice within early childhood settings. The progress of individual learners is tracked and a personalised approach is taken to ensure learners succeed.
- There is good evidence of systematic feedback mechanisms in place for the teaching practice components of the course. Observations by the Maria Montessori Education Foundation course coordinator and school associates provide valuable feedback to learners on their progress.
- Learner feedback and evaluation is mostly informal and conversational which is appropriate for the small number of learners. Self-assessment could be further strengthened through continuing development of feedback mechanisms ensuring that the learners are advised of the outcomes.

Findings¹

1.1 How well do learners achieve?

The rating for performance in relation to this key evaluation question is **Excellent**.

The rating for capability in self-assessment for this key evaluation question is **Excellent**.

The overall measure of learner achievement is the successful completion of the AMI 3-6 Diploma in Montessori Education, which was last awarded in 2011 with all learners who completed the programme passing the external examinations and being awarded the diploma. A recent comparative analysis by Maria Montessori Education Foundation of nine similar providers of early childhood education teacher training certificates and diplomas indicated that Maria Montessori Education Foundation had the highest qualification attainment rate.

This level of success has been maintained, with all current learners (13) in the first block of the 2015-2017 programme successfully completing the first summer module. All learners have met the theoretical requirements to complete the first teaching practice component and progress to the second summer module in 2016. The current cohort has no Māori, Pasifika or international learners.

There is good evidence that learners acquire a deep understanding of the development of the child, how to work with the teaching materials, and the educational benefits for children. Self-evaluation and critical thinking skills are embedded in individual learning, and learners recognise the skills they have achieved and are ready to return to their teaching roles to put the new skills into practice in the classroom.

Individual progress, skill development and component completion are well-known with the small number of learners. The monitoring of the educational performance of every learner is well understood by the organisation.

¹ The findings in this report are derived using a standard process and are based on a targeted sample of the organisation's activities.

1.2 What is the value of the outcomes for key stakeholders, including learners?

The rating for performance in relation to this key evaluation question is **Excellent**.

The rating for capability in self-assessment for this key evaluation question is **Excellent**.

Learners highly value the teacher training provided by Maria Montessori Education Foundation because it provides strong theoretical knowledge and understanding of the Montessori philosophical model. This enhances their own teaching philosophy and contributes to their personal and professional growth. It is a distinct value that the qualification is internationally recognised, which enables graduates to travel and work in other countries – four of the 2011 graduates are now working in Montessori centres overseas. The AMI external examiner report sighted by the evaluators confirms that the quality of the graduates meets international standards.

There is a strong relationship with AUT (Auckland University of Technology) through the Bachelor of Education programme having a Montessori component in the third year. There is good evidence that this close working relationship is building a study pathway for AUT graduates to the Montessori diploma – in 2009 two students continued to the diploma and are now working in Montessori schools. In the 2015 intake there are five AUT graduates on the diploma course. External stakeholders confirmed that AMI diploma graduates are highly sought after by Montessori schools both in New Zealand and overseas.

Montessori school owners and the Montessori Aotearoa New Zealand Council members interviewed by the evaluation team strongly support this Montessori teacher education, which promotes a qualified workforce in early childhood centres within the New Zealand context. Eight of the 13 learners in the current cohort are being sponsored by their employers to achieve this AMI qualification. School owners stated a preference for employing teachers with AMI training because these graduates experience deep learning, really understand the materials and equipment they work with, and are always thinking about the children and their development.

Maria Montessori Education Foundation fully engages with the national Montessori community of teachers, parents, school owners, childcare professionals, academics and other interested people by providing a range of professional development opportunities such as workshops with visiting overseas speakers, presentations at national conferences, and newsletters. The annual delivery of the AMI Montessori Classroom Assistants Certificate course is well attended and provides an opportunity for Maria Montessori Education Foundation to engage with potential diploma applicants – four of the current cohort were attracted to the diploma programme after achieving this certificate.

1.3 How well do programmes and activities match the needs of learners and other stakeholders?

The rating for performance in relation to this key evaluation question is **Excellent**.

The rating for capability in self-assessment for this key evaluation question is **Excellent**.

The AMI 3-6 Diploma in Montessori Education is well matched to the needs of the key stakeholders. The Maria Montessori Education Foundation is the official New Zealand teaching training centre of AMI, and the diploma programme is designed to provide training grounded in a thorough understanding of Montessori principles and child development.²

Learners choose to study in this diploma to achieve an internationally recognised qualification, to learn more about the Montessori teaching philosophy, and to engage more deeply with the materials. In interviews with the evaluators, learners confirmed the depth and intensity of the training as being transformational, and those working in the Montessori schools spoke highly of the quality of the graduates from the diploma programme.

The organisation as a whole is well connected to the national Montessori community and organises professional development activities such as bringing in visiting international speakers to increase awareness of Montessori education in New Zealand. A survey undertaken by Montessori Aotearoa New Zealand in 2014 indicates a growing demand for qualified teachers, with 200 Montessori teachers needed over the next five years, and Maria Montessori Education Foundation intends to increase the intake on the next course.

While the trustees have been actively involved in the NZQA mandatory review of early childhood qualifications, it is apparent that the outcomes related to the AMI 3-6 Diploma in Montessori Education will not fully align with any of the new qualifications that have been developed. Maria Montessori Education Foundation has a clear understanding of the challenge of aligning an internationally developed qualification to a New Zealand qualification, and is currently considering options to ensure the internationally recognised and well-renowned AMI 3-6 Diploma can continue to be delivered in New Zealand to meet the needs and demand of its learners and stakeholders.

Since 2011, self-assessment and feedback (formal and informal) from a range of stakeholders has contributed to a number of changes including:

- Course delivery changed from a modular format over 18 months to three summer blocks of eight weeks to give teachers greater access to the training, and to enable AUT Bachelor of Education students to complete Montessori training concurrently

² www.mmef.org.nz

- Change of delivery site to a calm and peaceful environment that is more aligned to the Montessori philosophy
- Recent setting up an alumni group for graduates to meet regularly for ongoing professional development and networking
- Greater emphasis on the AMI Montessori Classroom Assistants Certificate course providing a pathway to the diploma programme
- Building relationships with AUT and the Bachelor of Education programme to provide a pathway from the Bachelor's degree to the diploma. This has resulted in an increase in Bachelor of Education graduates undertaking Montessori training, from two in 2011 to five in 2015.

Some of these changes, such as the delivery site and relationships with AUT, have been reviewed as worthwhile and effective, although it is too early to understand the effectiveness of other changes.

1.4 How effective is the teaching?

The rating for performance in relation to this key evaluation question is **Excellent**.

The rating for capability in self-assessment for this key evaluation question is **Excellent**.

The AMI director of training is a highly skilled and internationally experienced teacher of Montessori education. The course assistant works alongside, and is being trained by, the director of training. The director of training is attached to another AMI training centre when not in New Zealand, and the course assistant is actively involved as an AMI-trained teacher/supervisor in a Montessori school. Learners describe their teachers as very knowledgeable, caring and supportive and role models of the Montessori teaching process.

A range of teaching strategies is used to integrate and embed theory with practice to create an engaging learning environment. There is a strong focus on self-evaluation and supervised practice to enhance learning. Learners are encouraged to extend their own learning, and all course materials are required to meet the AMI international standards to ensure consistency of learning. While the course is fully prescribed by AMI, the New Zealand context is included in several components of the course.

Formative assessment is an integral part of the learning environment and is used to improve skills and practice on a continuous cycle. This leads to the formation of comprehensive curriculum albums for each component of the course, which become models of practice for reference and use in the graduate's own teaching. Teacher observation, self and peer assessment (both oral and written) are used to monitor progress throughout the course. Summative assessment is used to

confirm progression during the course, with AMI written and oral external examinations leading to the award of the qualification.

Internal moderation is used to validate learner achievement, to ensure consistency of outcomes, and to provide feedback on successful assessment strategies. The final examinations are externally assessed and moderated by an AMI external examiner.

While informal feedback is embedded as part of the learning environment, the use of a wider range of formal feedback mechanisms would strengthen self-assessment of teaching and learning.

1.5 How well are learners guided and supported?

The rating for performance in relation to this key evaluation question is **Excellent**.

The rating for capability in self-assessment for this key evaluation question is **Excellent**.

With the small number of learners, there is a real sense of a community of learners who respect and support each other on a daily basis. Individual guidance and support is provided seamlessly by the teaching staff at Maria Montessori Education Foundation and is highly effective in supporting learners to achieve educational success. The learners spoke highly of the caring, supportive learning environment and clearly understood the processes required to meet timelines and guidelines.

The welcome information and student handbook provide details of the course and the campus, and relevant rules, regulations and requirements. Learners confirmed that they were well informed prior to arriving at the course, and that the course handbook provided them with the information they needed to support them in their studies. The new site includes accommodation options and leisure activities to better support learners from outside the Auckland region.

The high achievement rate is recognised by Maria Montessori Education Foundation as 'evidence that students are able to access the support that they need during their studies'.

1.6 How effective are governance and management in supporting educational achievement?

The rating for performance in relation to this key evaluation question is **Excellent**.

The rating for capability in self-assessment for this key evaluation question is **Good**.

Maria Montessori Education Foundation is a charitable trust and has been established as a PTE since 2008, holding accreditation with AMI as a training centre to offer the AMI diploma course that is internationally recognised for its high standard and authenticity. Through this affiliation, Maria Montessori Education

Foundation training has a strong reputation for high-quality graduates within the Montessori community and the childcare profession both in New Zealand and overseas.

The trustees are the management team who monitor performance against two key documents:

- Strategic Education and Training Plan 2012-2015 which clearly identifies the goals, objectives and performance indicators to establish AMI training in New Zealand
- Self Assessment Plan 2011-2016 with benchmarks for student achievement and student satisfaction and other performance dimensions. This document provides guidance for the ongoing reflection and evaluation practice which is embedded within management practice.

There is good evidence that the management of Maria Montessori Education Foundation is highly regarded by the Montessori school community and members of the advisory committee, who regularly provide voluntary support where operational expertise in key and specialist activities is needed.

The academic team are all AMI-trained teachers who are responsible for ensuring that the training provided meets the AMI curriculum and assessment standards. The vision to have a trained AMI trainer in New Zealand is on track and will lead to more opportunities to deliver professional development courses across the region without always having to bring AMI trainers from overseas.

As mentioned earlier in the report, the uncertainty regarding the future delivery of this AMI diploma in New Zealand because of its possible lack of alignment with the proposed qualifications from the NZQA mandatory review is under discussion. Maria Montessori Education Foundation is consulting with its stakeholders and communities to identify possible solutions.

Reflective practice and self-assessment are embedded within the organisation in an open and transparent culture and there is good evidence of commitment to the self-assessment plan. However, there is a lack of evidence of a more systematic evaluative approach to the outcomes of self-assessment, and there is limited data because of timing around understanding the effectiveness of some of the improvements which have been implemented.

Focus Areas

This section reports significant findings in each focus area, not already covered in Part 1.

2.1 Focus area: Governance, management and strategy

The rating in this focus area for educational performance is **Excellent**.

The rating for capability in self-assessment for this focus area is **Good**.

2.2 Focus area: AMI 3-6 Diploma in Montessori Education (Level 6)

The rating in this focus area for educational performance is **Excellent**.

The rating for capability in self-assessment for this focus area is **Excellent**.

Recommendations

NZQA recommends that Maria Montessori Education Foundation:

- Continue to develop organisational self-assessment by using evidence to inform decision-making and to evaluate the effectiveness of improvements.

Appendix

Regulatory basis for external evaluation and review

External evaluation and review is conducted according to the External Evaluation and Review (EER) Rules 2013, which are made by NZQA under section 253 of the Education Act 1989 and approved by the NZQA Board and the Minister for Tertiary Education, Skills and Employment.

Self-assessment and participation in external evaluation and review are requirements for maintaining accreditation to provide an approved programme for all TEOs other than universities. The requirements are set through the NZQF Programme Approval and Accreditation Rules 2013, which are also made by NZQA under section 253 of the Education Act 1989 and approved by the NZQA Board and the Minister for Tertiary Education, Skills and Employment.

In addition, the Private Training Establishment Registration Rules 2013 require registered private training establishments to undertake self-assessment and participate in external evaluation and review, in accordance with the External Evaluation and Review Rules (EER) 2013, as a condition of maintaining registration. The Private Training Establishment Registration Rules 2013 are also made by NZQA under section 253 of the Education Act 1989 and approved by the NZQA Board and the Minister for Tertiary Education, Skills and Employment.

NZQA is responsible for ensuring non-university TEOs continue to comply with the rules after the initial granting of approval and accreditation of programmes and/or registration. The New Zealand Vice-Chancellors' Committee (NZVCC) has statutory responsibility for compliance by universities.

This report reflects the findings and conclusions of the external evaluation and review process, conducted according to the External Evaluation and Review (EER) Rules 2013.

The report identifies strengths and areas for improvement in terms of the organisation's educational performance and capability in self-assessment.

External evaluation and review reports are one contributing piece of information in determining future funding decisions where the organisation is a funded TEO subject to an investment plan agreed with the Tertiary Education Commission.

External evaluation and review reports are public information and are available from the NZQA website (www.nzqa.govt.nz).

The External Evaluation and Review (EER) Rules 2013 are available at <http://www.nzqa.govt.nz/assets/About-us/Our-role/Rules/EER-Rules.pdf>, while information about the conduct and methodology for external evaluation and review can be found at <http://www.nzqa.govt.nz/providers-partners/external-evaluation-and-review/policy-and-guidelines-eer/introduction/>.

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