

Dr Maree Matthews FAIM

With a doctorate in philosophy and certificates in leadership and advanced international school leadership under her belt, Dr Maree Matthews FAIM is passionate about continued learning.

Fellow Q&A by Tamra Carr

Dr Matthews walked *Leader* through how she puts theory into practice at Bibra Lake's Blue Gum Montessori School.

Can you describe a challenge you faced while in a leadership position? What did you learn from the experience?

The murder of a colleague outside the front of a previous school was a challenge; it took immense leadership to face the students and their families and to deal with the aftermath. I certainly have learnt how to remain calm in the middle of a 'tornado', be prepared for whatever is coming my way, act with humility and value the moments we have together.

What in your mind makes a good leader?

Someone who acts with humility, has a good work ethic, is not scared to say 'I will have to research that' and tries to be the best one can be by constantly learning. Specific to the education milieu, genuinely ensuring student, teacher and parent learning is at the core of your leadership, being transformational and having a growth mindset to continually try and perfect one's craft, knowing what style, skill and behaviour to engage for the best outcome and balancing governance and operations to achieve the best result are important.

What is your philosophy for running a school?

Having trust in your team and community by acting with a moral compass. Not being frightened to distribute the leadership by directing, mentoring, supporting and making the hard decisions.

What are some of the lesser known elements to a child's education that contribute significantly to them getting the most out of school?

Working in partnership by engaging with parents/guardians to bring them along on the journey, providing parent education sessions and allowing them to observe their child in class to further develop shared understandings and giving parents the opportunity to experience a Montessori education and be at the centre of their child's learning.

What are the main differences between a Montessori school and a school with a more traditional curriculum?

In Montessori education we personalise each child's learning. Learning can occur in any order as selected by the student. For example, spelling can occur when the child feels like it, but it must be done each day, ensuring freedom within limits. Therefore, students are the master of their learning under the mentorship of their teachers. Students are encouraged to develop enquiry into a holistic curriculum, executive functioning skills and become researchers of their own learning. Learning occurs at the point of need, not by a set-year, levelled curriculum.



bio

Dr Maree Matthews FAIM

Role Principal/CEO Blue Gum Montessori School

Studied Melbourne University, Harvard University, Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT) University

Worked Austin Hospital School, International School of Brussels, Methodist Ladies' College (Melbourne)

Member since 2017

Is Montessori education growing in popularity in Australia and Western Australia?

Demand is growing for a better and more relevant education and Montessori ticks all these boxes. Parents are now quite discerning about the type of education they aspire to for their children. Many families come to us searching for a school that can extend their children and not a curriculum that just teaches to the middle. Many parents would like the government to recognise Montessori pedagogy and provide additional funding to support parent choice. Affordability is a key issue and should go wherever the student attends. Montessori puts the student first.

What are three things you want every child to know when they graduate from Blue Gum Montessori School?

Know their passions as lifelong learners, think locally and act globally and be confident with who they are.

Could you outline the most notable bit of wisdom imparted to you?

Nurture relationships and never stop learning. 🍎