The **Fountain Lakes Montessori Pre-School** is dedicated to helping children become confident, independent individuals with well-developed powers of reasoning and enthusiasm for learning.

We believe that as children develop these qualities they become increasingly able to take advantage of the unique environment that a Montessori classroom has to offer. We follow the educational philosophy of Dr Maria Montessori in order to provide children with an individual learning experience that can last a lifetime.

Over the years, our school has grown and we now have in excess of 50 families (60 children) who attend from one to eight sessions per week. We have also just built an additional classroom which can accommodate another 50 children.

We strive to offer a professional service to the parent group of the school, but are finding it increasingly difficult to do so with the increased numbers of students. With the new classroom and further increase in numbers it is going to be impossible to manage without a computer system.

With this aim we would like to develop a system that would help us with the following functions:

- Development of a web site to provide information to prospective and current parents
- Management of Enquiries, Waiting List and Allocation
- Management of Enrolments including Class Allocation
- Management of School Fees and bonds

The Current System:

The current system at the Pre-School is a combination of paper-based and computer based documents (word and excel files) storing a range of information. A great deal of the information is duplicated, and it is very time-consuming to retrieve the information we require and extract the various reports that we need.
Interview 1 with Pre-School Administrator:

Q. **How do prospective parents find out about the Fountain Lakes Montessori Pre-School?**

A. There are a number of ways that parents find out about the Pre-School which include:

- contacting The Montessori Association who direct them to us;
- visiting our stand at various community and fund-raising events and talking to the parents who are available at these events to answer questions;
- word of mouth from current or previous parents.

The prospective parents then contact us for further information. Currently, we do not capture any information about these enquiries and that is something we really want to do, so that we can follow up on them.

Q. **What sort of information would you need about these enquiries?**

A. Well we would like to introduce an Enquiry Form that prospective parents could fill out at these events if they wanted to, or we could fill out when parents contacted us. We need the name of the child, their gender and their date of birth to be able to assess if it is worth following up. We would not bother if there is no chance of them getting a place. We would also need the parents or guardians details with information such as name, address, relationship to child, telephone contact details, email, how they found out about our pre-school, details of siblings who have attended, are attending or are likely to attend a Montessori Pre-School.

Once we have all this information, we would like to use it to print mailing labels if required to inform prospective parents of up-coming information nights and other events that may be of interest. We can also use it to directly contact prospective parents, especially if we need more enrolments and we do not have a suitable child on the waiting list.

Q. **What do you mean by a suitable child?**

A. To explain that, I really need to explain the way the Montessori system works. In the Montessori system, and in our Pre-School in particular we have 2 types of classrooms and operate for 4 terms a year. We have the ‘Little House’ where 2-year-old children start for just one morning (Friday) a week. As they get older and if the teacher believes they are ready, they do their Friday morning session at the “Big House”. This is called a transition session. Again, based on their readiness and as they become 3 years old, they start attending sessions at the “Big House” and stop attending the “Little House” or transition session at the “Big House”.

The “Big House” runs what we call Cycle 1, which is a 3-year program for children from the age of 3 to 6 years old. There are 2 sessions per day from Monday to Thursday. The children start with a few sessions per week graduating to approximately 4 sessions per week for 4 year olds, and by the end of their third year they are usually doing 8 sessions a week. However, it is important to note that the number of sessions a child may do is tailored to their individual needs.
Generally, speaking the number of sessions for a child is set at the start of each term. However, sometimes the teacher may recommend additional or reduced sessions for a child during the term based on their needs.

The teacher also looks at the balance of the classroom. Ideally we like to balance age and gender. So for example in a classroom of 24 we would ideally like eight 3-year-old kids (4 male and 4 female), eight 4-year-old kids (4 male and 4 female), and eight 5-year-old kids (4 male and 4 female). While this is ideal, it is very difficult to achieve so we are not overly fussed about it.

So to get to your question, a suitable child is one that helps with the balance of the classroom. However, we would rarely take a child in who was older than about 3½ years, because they had not come through the system. We would ideally like the children to start when they are about 2 years of age.

Q. So where does the new classroom fit in?
A. The new classroom will operate exactly like the “Big House” does currently.

Q. So how could a computer system help with your enquiries?
A. We are hoping that once the enquiry information is in the system, we can send information to prospective parents, find suitable children for enrolment based on their age and gender, record if they have come for a visit, record any relevant comments to help us work out if the enquiry is worth following up, modify the details if the information changes and delete the enquiry if they are no longer interested. We do not want to continually send people information and harass them if they are not interested. Oh yes, we would need to get permission on the enquiry form to send them information.

Q. Would you just want store one comment?
A. We would like to record a range of comments for the child, with the date of the comment and the name of the person who recorded the comment. We would actually like to be able to view all the comments associated with each child easily, possibly via date or the person who made them.

Q. You mentioned a web site in your preliminary information. What role would you see that playing?
A. We would see it primarily as a marketing tool. It is something that we really want, so that we can direct prospective parents to the most up-to-date information about the Montessori philosophy and the way our particular Pre-School works. It should have the enquiry form on-line so that parents may complete it and send it to us so that they can be added to our list of enquiries.

We would also like current and prospective parents to be able to see the most up-to-date list of events being organised by the Pre-School, and to be able to print out the requirements for it. For example, if the event is a Musician coming to the school, we may want each child to bring a musical instrument to the event.
Parents often forget this, so it would be great if they could look up this information on-line.

Q. What happens if a person on the Enquiries list is interested in following up on the enquiry?
A. The first thing we do is check to see if there is any chance of that child type (age and gender) getting a place, by looking at the waiting list, allocations and current enrolments. So for example if we have thirty 3 year old girls on the waiting list we would be loathe to mislead a family with that child type into believing that a place may become available. However, a lot of people want to be put on the waiting list regardless of what we tell them.

If there is a chance of getting a place, we organise an information visit for the parent. During this visit we take them around the classrooms and let them see the children in action. At the end of the visit we note their comments and ask if they want to organise a visit with their child. If they do not organise it on the spot, we contact them in a week for a follow up and delete the enquiry if they say they are no longer interested. If they are interested, we then organise a visit for the child where they participate in the classroom and the teacher observes them. Once this is done the child may be offered a place on the waiting list. To get on the waiting list the parent has to pay a $50.00 non-refundable payment. At this point we also note when the parent would like the child to start if at all possible.

Q. When is a child actually offered a place at the Pre-school?
A. Usually, places become available at the start of the year, as children at the end of Cycle 1 move on to Primary School. However, there may also be a change in family circumstance (eg. moving) so places do become available throughout the year. Whenever a place becomes available or we know will be available because of children leaving, we assess what the Pre-School requires and then review the waiting list. The children on the waiting list are then offered a place to start either straight away or to start at some time in the future. If the child is allocated a place, they are moved to the allocated list, and we note their expected start date, and expected number of sessions. As part of this allocation process the parents must pay a bond of $600 to secure the place. This bond is refundable if a term’s notice is given before leaving, or if the child has completed Cycle 1. If a child does not start even though they have an allocated place, they are refunded 50% of the bond, if we can find another child to replace them. Otherwise, the bond is forfeited.

Q. What happens when the child does start at the Pre-school?
A. Before the child starts the Enrolment form (see attachment) must be completed and the bond must be paid. The teacher meets with the parents and works out the ideal number and type of sessions (morning, afternoon and the days of the week) for the child. The parent is given the child’s schedule and start date, when this is finalised.
Q. So how do you see a computer system supporting these activities?
A. Firstly, we need to be able to record and access all the information we have talked about. We need to be able to record the change in a child’s status as they move from Enquiry to Waiting to Allocation and then finally Enrolment. They may not necessarily go through all the phases. For example, if we need a particular child type they may go straight from Enquiry to Enrolment.

To work out availability when allocating children to sessions, we need to know:
- the mix of children and expected end date for each current session
- the mix of children and expected start date on the waiting and allocated lists

This allocation is a very difficult job, so it is something that we really want supported. We have to make sure that we don’t exceed our limit of 25 children at one time in the “Big House” and 10 children in the “Little House”. It will be even more difficult when the second “Big House” starts taking enrolments. We would like to produce Class Lists for each session for each day, a Birthday List and a Contact List for each child.

Q. Is there any other information that we need to know?
A. I am not quite sure at the moment, but please feel free to ask questions, and we will let you know if there is anything further that we think of.

The following functionality is required FOR STUDIO GROUPS OF 4 ONLY

Q. Can you tell us how we can support the financial activities of the Pre-School?
A. We do not want support for all financial activities of the Pre-School, just the payments made from parents for a place on the waiting list, the enrolment bond and the term fees each term. For each of these, we need to produce an invoice, a receipt when payment is made, and a reminder notice after 3 weeks if a payment is not made.

Q. How are the Term school fees calculated?
A. It is actually a very simple formula:
   1 session per week $25.00 per session
   2-3 sessions per week $20.00 per session
   4+ sessions per week $15.00 per session

The only thing you need to be aware of are the term dates as the term does not always start on a Monday, so students are then charged for sessions from the day the Pre-School opens for that week. They do pay for any public holidays that are on the same day as their session.

Q. So is just one invoice issued per term?
A. In most cases that would be right, however, sometimes the number of sessions that a child does increases during the term if the teacher thinks they are ready. In that case we have to issue an invoice for the additional sessions.