



Casa Bilingual Montessori School

Excellence Profile
**Self-directed within a broad-based
environment.**

Jury Report Excellent Schools

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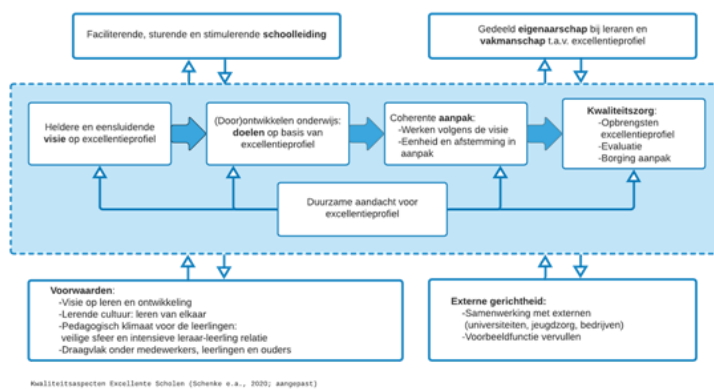
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1. Introduction

Introduction

In Dutch schools, efforts are made in a variety of ways to provide good education. At some schools this leads to education of exceptional quality. Schools in primary, secondary and special education can apply to the Excellente Scholen jury for recognition of this quality and appreciation for their efforts and achievements. The Excellente Scholen program helps to put exceptional examples of Dutch education in the spotlight, and aims to contribute to an educational culture in which it is natural to share expertise and strive for improvement.



The jury assesses the excellence profile on the quality aspects from the chart where possible in conjunction. They are the following quality aspects as named in the application form:

- the excellence profile from the vision of learning and development,
- (continued) development of education,
- (coherent) approach,
- quality assurance (measurable and appreciable results, evaluation and assurance)
- external focus and knowledge sharing.

2.

Conclusion & summary

The jury finds that Casa Bilingual Montessori School (hereinafter Casa) is deserving of the Excellent School 2023-2026 designation for primary education.

The jury is impressed with the degree of self-direction of students at this school, as well as the broad-based learning environment within which this learning takes place.

Bilingual education (Dutch-English) from ages 3 to 12 is part of this broadly-oriented environment. From the interviews and during the tour of the 2 school buildings, the students show that they have insight into their own knowledge and abilities and can direct their learning and development process.

Casa invites children to achieve learning and growth in ways that can be different for each child. From a clear Montessori vision "Teach me to do it myself" (ages 0-6) and "Help me think for myself" (ages 6-12), Montessori-trained professionals facilitate the learning process by preparing the environment, providing instruction, reflecting and inspiring, supporting group processes and maintaining order.

At Casa, Montessori-trained guides from around the world work together to create a learning environment in which children flourish. Casa's guides closely monitor and track children's development so that they can best respond to the degree of self-direction, initiative and cooperation a child demonstrates. In addition to individual or group lessons, children are given the opportunity to indicate what they want to learn or to explore on their own.

In their explanations, children take the judges through the complexity and completeness of the planning boards that hang in all lower and upper elementary groups and on which the entire organization runs. On these boards are visible both the learning lines and each day's schedule, with any extra or special activities and the group activities. As well as which lessons guides are teaching and which children want to join them. The jury finds it admirable that children themselves can indicate on the board that they need a lesson and that they also give lessons to each other in the process.

Delegations from other Montessori schools around the country and Montessori specialists from around the world visit Casa frequently. They see the presence and structural use of all the Montessori materials as a positive focal point. The rich and prepared (learning) environment ensures that the school receives many compliments. In this, the school is an example for other schools.

3. Findings research on the excellence profile based on the quality aspects

Background data of the school

Sector	Primary education
School name	Casa Bilingual Montessori School
Brin	30KD c1
Location	Pijnacker
Board	Casa School Foundation

3.1 The excellence profile from the vision of learning and development

The excellence profile "Self-directed within a broadly-oriented environment" is based on the Montessori principles of the international Association Montessori Internationale (AMI). Casa formulates 6 pillars and International Montessori is pillar 1. Children ages 1 through 12 can attend the school All Day, All Year (pillar 3) and receive bilingual education (Dutch-English, pillar 2). Casa provides education 50 weeks a year, and school hours are from 8 a.m. to 2 p.m.. After that, 'extracurricular' activities are scheduled until 6 p.m. The school is a "one-board operation" and calls itself an intuitive school that shapes its education based on experience. Currently, the school has a waiting list and approximately 430 children (including 70 toddlers) attend the school. Pillar 4 is about the continuous learning process, with Pillar 5 being nature education and Pillar 6 being nutrition and food preparation.

Continuous self-direction

From her vision of self-direction, Casa places different emphases in the Children's House groups than in the Lower and Upper Elementary groups. 'Teach me to do it myself' is paramount for the 3- to 6-year-olds. The selection from which the children can choose is broad and gives children a lot of variety and opportunities. For the younger children at the school, physical and motor skills are very important. The order of the materials in the cabinets makes it clear to the children what materials they can work with. The guides are the link between a prepared environment and the child.

From the Lower Elementary - the 6 - to 12-year-olds - "Help me think for myself" takes center stage. At this stage, Casa responds to children's social needs. Guides work as little as possible with individual students, but mainly in groups. Group work is important and children learn to work together, interact appropriately, make good choices and take initiatives. The children feel responsible for their classrooms as well as every other part of the school, according to the principal. The guides inspire and instruct the children. Through reflection, they gain insight into their development and their role in the world.

Student self-direction

The judges were impressed by the students' degree of self-direction and how they have visibility into their own ability and knowledge. "We can only inspire and guide children in their development, we can not force them to learn" is the school's vision. This ensures that there is constant alignment with the children on their needs to achieve learning and growth. Structurally, the school reflects with the children every month on their own actions. "What succeeded and what didn't?" And how does a child feel about that?

The board states the following: "We have children who move independently, who are aware of themselves and know why they do things." Parents confirm this picture and give examples of it. For example, they see a smooth transition to secondary school (vo) in planning and independence.

At Casa, guides - these may be teachers, teaching assistants or teaching assistants - work alongside the child, and have an eye and ear for each child's inner drive. In that role, sometimes you are an inspirer, sometimes a guide, sometimes a caregiver. And sometimes a "wonderer" who tries to awaken wonder in children and manages to spark their imagination, for example, by telling stories. One guide compares her job to that of a marathon runner's buddy. "You can guide someone to water, but the person himself has to want to drink," she said. According to the Casa vision, children sometimes need a push as well as frameworks within which they are allowed to move.

The school has made the so-called soft skills "hard" through a comprehensive observation tool. The school can use this to indicate where a child stands in development and which skills the child has mastered. Beautiful examples of self-directed children emerged during the tour. For example, one student told us that he wanted to work on math, spelling and topography that day and on English and reading comprehension tomorrow. He loves the fact that he can choose multiple things and not have someone else decide for him what to learn. Another student mentioned that if you can't do it or you don't feel like it, your guides or your friends help you by doing something together. You don't have to work alone then and that's nice.

A broad-based environment

According to Casa, student self-direction can only take place if the environment for this is optimally designed. The jury was able to take full note of this broadly oriented environment. At Casa, all Montessori materials are present and the guides know how to use these materials. The Montessori materials, in which especially three-dimensional processing is central, require in-depth knowledge of how to handle them properly. Casa is exceptional in this respect, because many Montessori schools use methodical curricula for different subject areas and do not use all Montessori materials up to and including the Upper Elementary grades.

The school has assembled large groups that have double classrooms, creating space to work with many materials. This also allows for a lot of supervision. The school indicates that it considers 3 things essential for a continuous learning pathway (pillar 4), namely:

- To learn about yourself;
- To learn to get along with others;
- To learn about the world.

Nature education (pillar 5) and nutrition and food preparation (pillar 6) are other important pillars within Casa. There are several outdoor classrooms where children may work and care for animals. There is plenty to discover and explore. Children decide when to go to the outdoor classroom and what to do there. The outdoor guide

notes how the children play, whether they clean up, whether they are concentrating on work and which students rarely come outside. At school, the children also help prepare food, serve food and drinks and clean up. Young children learn to cut fruit, set the table and learn table manners. In the Lower and Upper Elementary, students learn to cook.

3.2 (Further) development of education and the goals of the school

Based on its vision, mission and ambitions, the school has formulated goals to develop its education. The first objective indicates that the school wants to guide children in such a way that they develop a learning attitude and are self-directed in their learning process. This involves children making independent choices, reflecting, thinking creatively and being able to deal with change.

The benchmarks provided by the school to see if this objective has been met could also be observed by the jury. Children move through the school independently and choose their own learning activities. They are focused and engaged in learning at their own level. Children told the jury what they are doing and why they are doing it. In doing so, they take responsibility for their actions and actively think about how things are going at school. The second main objective indicates that the school wants to support the child in its development to become a global citizen. And that they take responsibility for their own actions. The jury saw and heard many of these benchmarks during the tour and in the interviews. In the development plan, Casa describes short- and long-term goals with which it continues to develop. Quarterly, Casa monitors these objectives on the basis of a report and the management team (MT) evaluates the process, making adjustments where necessary. The MT then communicates the progress to all employees. The jury noticed that the primary process, from the Montessori idea and working method, is central to the development plans.

The board on which the entire organization runs

Each Lower and Upper Elementary group has a board on which the entire organization runs. Some students gave the panel a detailed explanation of how the board works. It shows a schedule of the day, goals the students can work on, and there are cards with "lessons" they are given. The judges are impressed with the functionality and efficiency the school achieves with these boards. And of how the boards make clear to all children and guides which children are where, and what guidance they are entitled to. Each board has a Big work section, where the children's "big" activities hang: activities where they get to do research, work on projects, prepare speaking engagements or join field trips. The judges admired the way the children have visibility into everything that goes on in the group. Children can indicate, by posting their name tag, which lessons and activities they join and when they have a mentor meeting. The organization on the board is developed and completed each time, and remains a development point. The Children's House does not work with a board. The jury inquired why there is no 'planning board' especially with the young children, but this is not part of Maria Montessori's approach. The self-directed character in the Children's House is mainly in the materials. As a guide, you keep an eye on what material choices the children make and in what way they work with the materials; all this is recorded.

Class meeting every day

The jury experienced a nice form of self-direction from the students while attending a class meeting, as it takes place every day in the Lower and Upper Elementary. One student is chairman, another student is timekeeper, yet another student is note taker, and anyone who wants to may introduce an issue. The panel admires how this chairing is done and how the students and guide participate in the meeting. Children

speak seriously about a topic, listen carefully to each other and come up with solutions to problems the group is facing. The children speak English or Dutch and compliment each other using a talking stick/object.

Peace and positivity

At Casa, young children are already offered lessons; in doing so, the school uses the inner drive they have to develop. Guides try to stimulate that inner drive and make children aware of it. For example, three-year-olds walk independently through the school, on their way to the gym or to the outdoor classroom. They have a ribbon on with a certain color; therefore, everyone in the school knows where a child should go and can get support when needed. The guidance the children receive is based on the Positive Discipline methodology. Parents are included in this. As a parent, you receive training at school in this way of parenting, which also has an impact at home. For example, the jury spoke to parents who have been to a parent workshop several times. They indicated that this would be good for all parents. That way, as a parent, you learn not just to give your child compliments for a drawing they have made, but to really look at the drawing and put into words what you see. Routines and setting boundaries are essential in this approach. This is about the balance between being firm (strong) and child (friendly). Even as a guide, you cannot be autonomous in school; you cannot do your own things in your own classroom. Everyone is part of the team, where teamwork and speaking the same "language" is hugely important. Almost all teachers at Casa are specifically trained in Montessori principles. The teachers the jury spoke to praise the international AMI training because it elaborates the Montessori principles much more emphatically than the Dutch Montessori training. After following the international training and thanks to all the expertise present, the Casa team is now able to train each other further. And to help each other further with targeted feedback.

3.3 Coherent approach

The broad, rich environment and stimulation of all senses - combined with the structured and positive approach to self-direction - ensure that Casa children leave school broadly oriented. They are also caring, fluent in English and know what they can and want in life.

Sowing the seeds ...

Young children are already exposed to many materials, activities and events at Casa. They do not always do much with these at the time. Being allowed to observe ensures that children have the opportunity to apply what they have learned in a quiet and individual way. After a while, for example, a student is then given a small role to perform, such as checking that everyone has finished eating, or sweeping the floor after dinner. Children thus learn to care for the environment and for each other. A five-year-old can explain to a three-year-old how a certain material works and what you can do with it. The school looks carefully at what sensitive period a child is in and what they are interested in. For example, the jury spoke to a mother of a daughter in Lower Elementary who reads at a stretch. "Here she gets the chance to do that and can dive into this immensely. After a while, math will come back into the picture." The environment at Casa inspires children to think, discover and explore. Children learn to solve for themselves the problems they face. Parents indicate that this problem-solving behavior is also evident at the soccer club, for example, on Saturday mornings.

Getting on well in the world

Casa thinks carefully about the question: how do I put the child in the world? And what tools do I give them so that they can cope with challenges and come up with

new solutions? The children go on field trips at least 4 times a year and from the Lower Elementary onwards children go on a whole week of work. Children feel responsible - wherever they are - for themselves, each other and their environment. A member of the participation council indicates that Casa's children structurally graduate higher than the given school recommendation. According to him, this is partly due to the planning tools children are given, and the skill to direct their own learning and work. This helps them tremendously in secondary education. "Our Casa children are ahead, unafraid, confident and make choices that are right for them," he says. The school itself indicates that former students report that it works to their advantage that they learned to set goals. And that working with concrete materials supports their understanding in math and geometry, as well as a good command of English.

Self-direction and autonomy

Because the children at school can indicate themselves what they want to learn and investigate all kinds of things based on their own interests, a plus class or a separate enrichment program is not necessary. Children who prefer to learn in a different way can also work in the Science classroom. Children do not have to listen to instructions on subjects they have already mastered; everyone can follow their own learning pace and route. One teacher sighs that she is glad that "the school does not have extended instruction tables, where the same children regularly sit at. At Casa, children plan their own work moments in their work diaries, indicate what instructions they need and ask for help when they need it.

Guides observe the students and see what they need to move forward. After each working day there is a 15-minute meeting, where the guides talk about three children to see if they are giving these children what they need. Also at the team level, guides discuss whether they are succeeding in really helping the children move forward and making sure they are comfortable with themselves so that they can continue to develop.

3.4 Quality Assurance

The school keeps a close eye on the development of the pupils, in order to match this as closely as possible and provide an appropriate offer. For each student, Casa records in a report what skills they have performed on. This includes, for example, personal development, such as self-direction, emotion regulation, perseverance, as well as basic math skills, arithmetic, technical reading, spelling, reading comprehension and creative writing. Another section covers biology, art, science and technology, gym and outdoor work. Casa also tracks the progress of its guides. This mainly involves the phase of settling in, in which classroom observations - by the management, using a guideline - also play an important role.

Tests, goals, progress

Each child has a mentor. At least once a month, he or she checks with the child to see what he or she still needs and finds difficult to take the next steps in development. The mentor writes this down in the goal folder. Twice a year there is a benchmark meeting between children, mentor and parents. The children indicate what they have learned and what they want to work on in the coming period. Not only the guides scale the children on a large number of subjects; the children themselves do this as well. For example, children indicate that they are learning to think carefully about whom they ask for help and why. Because children of various ages sit together, there is always someone to whom they can turn. One student says she likes the fact that she can explain something to other children and then she does not keep the teacher from her work. Children take a number of IEP (Insight Own Profile) tests each year. With these, the guides monitor whether each child is making appropriate

developmental growth and what further offerings they need. In turn, lessons are provided for this, which children can join.

Guides' progress

For each guide, the school maintains a Journey New Employee chart, which clearly states what stage of onboarding that person is at and what activities are involved. A manual describes what is expected of guides. The rich and broadly-oriented environment that is there for the students is also there within the team. Many international staff and lateral entrants with a diversity of backgrounds and knowledge work within Casa. Everyone brings their own talents.

In recent years, Casa's team has been working to create more structure throughout the school and a system of continuous quality monitoring in the broad sense, including educational outcomes, quality assurance and risk management.

Observations in the classroom

Casa is still looking for a good way to structurally and similarly look at classes during visits and observation moments. There is a guideline by which guides evaluate themselves. Based on the completed guidelines, the director intuitively observes the guides. She visits each group 2 times a year for a whole day and has 3 main questions: 1) how do the guides share information about the children with each other, 2) what is the atmosphere like and how did the guide take care of it, and 3) how does the guide know that the children are doing what they should be doing? During the day, the jury saw several guides taking notes from the observations they made. At the end of the day, these notes are placed in MRX (Montessori Records Xpress): a customized registration and child tracking system for and by the school.

3.5 External focus and knowledge sharing

Casa receives many visits from other Montessori schools around the country and from Montessori specialists from around the world. They mention the presence and structural use of all Montessori materials as a positive point of interest in this regard. Those involved in the formation of a new IKC (Integrated Child Center) in the Netherlands are very interested in the integration of child care and school as offered by Casa. The rich and prepared learning environment ensures that the school receives many compliments on this. In this, Casa is an example for other schools. Since 2021, Casa - in cooperation with the International Montessori Institute - organizes an inspiration weekend for a wide audience. In addition, the board collaborated on the 2019 book *Let's Do This, the Art of Getting Schools Right* by Clien Wintzen. This book outlines profiles of special schools around the world; it includes Casa Montessori School. Not only the degree of student self-direction and the broad-based learning environment, but also the Montessori methodology are well worth sharing.

4.

Procedure

Casa Bilingual Montessori School has applied for the Excellent Schools pathway school year 2023-2026. A school applying for the pathway goes through the following stages:

Phase 1 Application period

Each school wishing to participate in the track provides a description of the excellence profile.

Phase 2 Verification by inspection

After the close of the application period, the inspection checks that your school is rated Good and that there are no recent contraindications.

Stage 3 Preliminary interview with the jury

The panel engages with the school about its excellence profile. The school clarifies ambiguities, addresses questions of accountability, accents and outlines what to expect when visiting the school.

Phase 4 Jury visit

Two members of the independent jury visit your school. They evaluate the excellence profile partly on the basis of the recognizability of the school's story in educational practice. In addition, they look at the unity of quality and the support for the profile at all levels of the school, from board to student.

Phase 5 Reporting and assessment

After each jury visit, the jury prepares a report. In it, the jury states its findings for each part of the jury visit. These findings are based on the description of the school's excellence profile, dossier research, the initial interview and the jury visit. Based on the findings, the jury concludes whether the school is entitled to the predicate and advises the Inspector General of Education on whether or not to award the predicate Excellent School.

Phase 6 Presentation of predicate

The predicate is valid from July 1, 2023, to July 1, 2026. The jury reports of schools awarded the predicate will be made public.

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Wat koopt juist?
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e4