

MERRITT BENCH ELEMENTARY STUDENT / PARENT HANDBOOK 2025-2026



Merritt Bench Elementary School

Student / Parent Handbook 2025/2026

THE MISSION OF BENCH ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Merritt Bench Elementary School's Mission

We, the students, staff, and parents of Merritt Bench Elementary School, are committed to making our time here a positive experience by working and learning together with respect for ourselves and others, striving to do our best at all that we do.

Our Goal

In our school, students will work at becoming successful learners who demonstrate respect for others and a commitment to achieving their best in every aspect of their lives.

Key Words and Value Statements

OUR	Students need to feel that they belong and that their school cares for them. Merritt Bench is a vital part of this community and all of us who are involved in the school share responsibility for the health of our neighborhood
WORK	Without effort, nothing is accomplished. Active learning is a cornerstone of education
SUCCESSFUL	Success leads to a positive attitude towards ourselves and the activities that we engage in. It motivates individuals to reach higher. Self-esteem is a prerequisite for future Success.
RESPECT	As we learn to respect and care for others, we learn to respect and care for both our world and for ourselves.
COMMITMENT	We put our energy and our resources into reaching our goals.
ACHIEVING	The achievements of our students are evidence of the success of the school.

MERRITT BENCH ELEMENTARY

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Mrs. Daniella Bennie	Principal
Mrs. Klassen	Secretary
Mr. Cleaveley	Grade 6/7
Mr. Schmid	Grade 5/6
Mrs. Vandenbrink	Grade 4/5
Miss Pineau	Grade 3/4
Mr. Denton	Grade 2/3
Ms. Jones	Grade 1/2
Ms. Kane	Kindergarten / Grade 1
Mrs. Goetz	Student Support
Mrs. Ottens	Librarian/Prep
Ms. Shackelly	Indigenous Student Advocate
Mrs. Angie Nicholls	EA
Mrs. Tumanguil	EA
Ms. Mackensen	EA
Mrs. Garbert	EA
Mrs. Michelle Hintz	Custodian
Ms. Grebinski	Hot Lunch Coordinator
Ms. Biccum	NHS
Ms. Ellis	NHS
Ms. Stapleton	NHS
Mrs. Sung	NHS
Mrs. Dixon	Intermediate Counsellor
Mrs. Sahota	Primary Counsellor
Mrs. Dawn Clarke	Speech-Language
Public Health Nurse	250-378-3400
Bethany Ryan	PAC President
Bailee Allen	Vice President
Amy Douthwright	Treasurer
Kayla McNaney	Secretary
Dana Grebinski	Fundraising Coordinator

Principal's Message

Welcome to the 2025/2026 school year at Merritt Bench Elementary School. We are a small but vibrant school community of about 150 students, where we work to ensure that every child is known, valued, and supported.

At our school, we believe in creating an inclusive and safe environment where all students feel they belong. We recognize and respect the diversity of our learners and aim to celebrate their unique strengths, support their challenges and honour the variety of backgrounds, experiences and stories they hold.

Our staff are committed to providing engaging learning experiences that educate the whole child, addressing academic growth as well as social/emotional, and physical development. We also place strong emphasis on social responsibility, helping students develop the values and skills they need to become thoughtful, caring and active citizens.

As we begin this year together, please take some time to review our school handbook and code of conduct with the children in your care. It contains important information to help us work together to ensure a positive and successful school year for everyone.

We look forward to a wonderful year ahead, filled with learning, growth and community.

Warm Regards,

Mrs. Daniella Bennie,
Principal

INFORMATION FOR PARENTS AND STUDENTS

School Hours

The warning bell rings at 8:25am and school starts at 8:30am each morning. Students should arrive between 8:15 and 8:25. Outside **supervision does not start** until 8:15am. Students should not be arriving at school before 8:15am unless they are attending an activity supervised by a staff member. After school we ask that students leave the school grounds by 2:45 pm. Supervision is limited to 15 minutes after the school day ends.

Attendance

It is important that students attend school each day and arrive at school on time. However, please do not send your child to school if he or she is ill.

Safe Arrival Program We have a safe arrival program provided by our School. To report your child's absence please: Visit

go.schoolmessenger.ca or use the **SchoolMessenger** App or call **1-**

844-434-8117 Arrivals/Dismissals

Students who arrive late or are being dismissed early must enter and leave through the front entrance and report to the office. Repeated tardiness or unexplained absences will be referred to the Principal.

Recess

Recess runs from 10am-10:15am each morning.

Noon Hour

Lunch is from 12:00pm – 12:55pm. Students eat in their classrooms and then go outside at 12:25pm. Afternoon classes begin at 1pm

**If students are well enough to be at school, they will be expected to go outside for fresh air and exercise at recess and lunch time.*

Lunch Procedures

Students stay at school for lunch unless they live nearby and have a parent at home to supervise. Please inform your child's teacher if your child will be going home for lunch daily or leaving occasionally. Students who go home for lunch are required to leave the grounds

promptly and must not return before 12:30 pm.

Students who eat lunch at school will be expected to bring a nutritious lunch from home. They are given 20 minutes to eat lunch, then they help clean up and go outside to play. All students are expected to go outside after they eat and should dress according to the weather.

Food that is brought from home should be ready to eat. Make sure lunches do not contain items that are likely to spoil in the warm classrooms during the morning. We are an allergy-aware school. If your child does have a specific food allergy, please ensure that the office and teacher are aware. As an allergy-aware building, we reduce risks where possible by telling students not to share food, encouraging hand washing, and educating staff and peers about allergy safety.

Supervision during lunch hour is provided by Noon Hour Supervisors. Eating lunch at school is a privilege which may be withdrawn. Please refer to the note under discipline for further details.

Dismissal/After School

The children are dismissed from school at 2:30 pm each afternoon. There is only 15 minutes of formal supervision. Students are expected to leave the school grounds promptly and report home. Students who are detained for any reason such as extra help will be asked to phone home to confirm their late arrival.

Parents should develop procedures for after-school with their children. We expect all children to inform a caregiver of any changes in their routine.

Online Communication

Some teachers may choose to use online programs to communicate with families and for homework assignments.

The teacher will contact you to provide this service through email or to have you sign up for the program.

Telephone Access

Students must ask their teacher for permission to use the phone. Play arrangements are not an acceptable reason to use the telephone.

Cell Phones/Electronics

Students are **NOT** permitted to use personal electronics at school, unless they are under the direct supervision of a teacher and use is limited to promoting online safety and focused learning environments. Specifically relating to personal devices, the following items are considered:

- The restrictions are related to instructional hours (which include recess and lunch hour).

- Approved use of personal devices is limited to instructional purposes and digital literacy.
- Use of the personal device should take into consideration is appropriate to the student's age and developmental stage.
- Considerations of personal electronics as they related to ensuring student accessibility and personal accommodation needs.
- Consideration of personal medical and health needs
- Consideration personal electronics use as it related to support learning outcomes.

TRAFFIC

The cooperation of parents is requested in keeping the streets around the school safe for all children. The areas marked by yellow curbs are No Stopping Zones. It would be helpful if parents could arrange to drop off and to pick up children on Gillis St by the community tennis courts to ease the traffic in our parking lot. Students are not permitted to walk or ride bikes through the parking lot area.

Please Do Not:

- Let children out in the middle of the Grimmnett St
- Block the crosswalks on Grimmnett St when dropping of children
- Stop to let children out in the front parking lot (between Grimmnett St and the School Gym)
- No parking at front of school
- **Speed through the parking lot at anytime!**

SAFETY

The safety of our students is very important to all of us. Parents can help us out by going over the following rules and procedures.

Please go over the route that your child takes to come and go from school and discuss where to go in case of danger. Walk with your child on the route until you can be certain that he or she is able to travel safely before you allow the child to walk to school. We encourage children to walk in small groups and not walk alone. Primary children should cross major streets only when you feel very comfortable that they can manage on their own.

If your child has permission to ride a bike, she or he **must** wear an approved helmet and have a strong bike lock. The school will not be responsible for lost or stolen bikes.

Roller blades, skateboards, scooters, and bicycles are not to be used on the school grounds.

Upon entering the school grounds all students must dismount their bikes and walk them to the bike stands. Students using rollerblades, scooters or skateboards must with take the items off or pick up the items and walk on the school grounds. Students who use these items in an unsafe manner will not be allowed to bring them to school.

We want to hear about any difficulties that your child may have gone to or from school. This includes problems with other children as well as any inappropriate approaches by strangers.

We also want to know who has permission to pick up your child after school. If there is to be any change in your usual routine, please call the school.

Parents who pick up or drop off children with a car should be aware that the areas near the crosswalk on Grimmett St. is a

“No Stopping Zone”. Oncoming drivers must be able to see the students using the crosswalks.

FIRE DRILLS

There will be a minimum of six fire drills a year. Students should always wear shoes, so they are able to evacuate the school quickly. Inside shoes should be left at school, especially during the winter months when boots are worn to and from school. If the school cannot be entered, all students will meet at the Nicola Valley Institute of Technology, (NVIT) grand room, located by the main entrance, and parents will be contacted.

HEALTH

The staff of Merritt Bench School make a point to be aware of the general health and well-being of the students. You will be contacted if we notice anything out of the ordinary. If your child becomes ill or suffers an injury at school, you or your emergency contact will be called. Please keep your phone numbers up to date.

Public Health Nurse

The school works closely with Public Health. They may be in touch with your regarding infectious diseases, immunizations, hearing tests along with any other school related health concern. The Public Health Nurse may be contacted by phone, through her office at the South-Central Health Unit (250-378-3400).

Lice

Please check your children’s hair on a regular basis for lice. This parasite is a major nuisance in all schools in the Merritt area. Once a child has been treated with an anti-lice shampoo, and the nits have been combed out, he or she may return to school.

Medicine

If your child requires the administration of any medication while he or she is at school, the nurse must be informed, your doctor must complete the required forms and the medication must be given to the principal. Children should not be sent to school with any type of non-prescription medicine.

Sleep

Your children's teachers believe that it is very important for students to have adequate rest if they are to do their best in school. Boys and girls who do not have enough sleep at night are irritable, unable to concentrate and tire easily during mental or physical work.

While children differ in the amount of rest that they require each night, a good guideline is 11 to 12 hours for primary children and 10 to 11 hours for intermediate students. If your child can get out of bed easily each morning and is happy and alert throughout the day, he or she is probably getting enough sleep.

Injuries

Staff members who have first aid training are always available to deal with minor injuries. Parents will be informed in the case of any problem that may require additional attention. Minor injuries that happen on the playgrounds will be noted and if extra attention is needed a note will be sent home with the child. For more serious injuries and concerns, parents or emergency contacts will be notified as soon as possible with recommendations for action.

Health Concerns

We need to hear from parents who have safety or health concern about any student. All adults have a duty to report concerns they may have about possible abuse or neglect of any child. The name of anyone who provides this information in good faith is kept confidential.

MERRITT BENCH ELEMENTARY

CODE OF CONDUCT GUIDELINE

FOR STUDENTS

Early Arrivals

If you enter the school before the bell, you must be always under the direct supervision of a teacher. You must have arranged with a teacher before you come in. You are not to come in to drop off books, instruments, backpacks, etc.

If you are well enough to come to school, you are well enough to stay outside until the bell rings.

Recess and Lunch

You are to go outside unless a staff member gives you permission to be in the school on that day. If you are well enough to come to school, you are well enough to go outside at recess and lunch.

Early dismissal

If you become ill and need to go home, you must have your parents' permission to do so. You must have permission from your teacher to call home and you must check with office staff before using the phone.

The person who picks you up must check with the office before you leave. If you leave school early for any reason you must let both your teacher and the office know.

Visitors

We do not allow people who are not Merritt Bench students or parents of students to be in the school or to play on the grounds without proper permissions/forms in place. All guests must report to the office. If you are being met by your brother, sister or friends, please have them meet you outside.

Bicycles, Skateboards, Skates and Scooters

These items are not to be used on the school grounds because of safety concerns. Skateboards and scooters are to be kept in the cloak areas of the classroom while they are at the school. If you use them in an unsafe way on your way to or from school you will not be allowed to bring them to school.

DISCIPLINE (Expectations for Student Behavior)

Guiding principles:

All students must feel physically and emotionally safe at Merritt

Bench Elementary Safe playground and safe working conditions are most important

All students must respect the rights of others

The school must operate in an orderly and efficient manner

These expectations apply to behavior at school, during school-organized or sponsored activities, and behavior beyond these times. (Including on-line behavior) that negatively impacts the safe, caring and orderly environment of the school, and/or student learning. The board will take all reasonable steps to prevent retaliation by a person against a student who has made a complaint about a breach of code of conduct.

The following behaviors are examples of what are considered serious:

- Fighting, bullying, cyberbullying, harassment, intimidation, threatening others or any form of violent behavior
- Language that is abusive or obscene- swearing
- Demeaning racial, religious, ethnic, or sexual comments
- Direct disobedience of a lawful request from a staff member
- Disruption of classes, assemblies, or other school activities
- Stealing
- Deliberate damage to the building or its contents

Merritt Bench Elementary School promotes the values expressed in the BC Human Rights Code respecting the rights of all individuals in accordance with the law prohibiting discrimination based on **(Indigenous identity, race, colour, ancestry, place of origin, religion marital status, family status, physical or mental disability, gender or sexual orientation, gender identity or expression or age)** in respect of discriminatory publication and discrimination in accommodation, service and facility in the school environment.

Any incidents will be investigated, and appropriate consequences will follow. Disciplinary measure taken by the staff will take into consideration the severity of the incident, the circumstances which led to it, and the past behavior of the students involved. **Restitution is a key factor in bringing about resolutions to conflicts that may arise.**

Consequences may range from a simple reprimand to loss of privileges or to suspension from school. The most frequent consequences are of the “time-out” format. The consequences of unacceptable behavior will consider the student’s age, maturity, and

disabilities or diverse abilities if they exist.

In most cases, discipline matters are dealt with in a routine manner as the student accepts responsibility and the consequences that are applied. Students with disabilities, diverse abilities of intellectual, physical, sensory, emotional or behavioral will be supported whenever possible. Parents will be contacted whenever there is a serious problem or where inappropriate behavior continues.

Please contact your child's teacher or the principal if your child has any difficulties with the behavior of other children or expresses concern about a disciplinary measure.

Notification Depending on the severity of the infraction the school will inform other parties as necessary. For example, parents of the student offender(s) and parents of the student victim(s) may be notified. In case of illegal activity, the RCMP will be notified. If the safety or well-being of a child is in question, the Ministry of Children and Families will be notified.

Lunch Hour Difficulties

A student whose behavior during the lunch hour becomes disruptive or dangerous to other children may lose the privilege of eating lunch at school. The school reserves the right to have that student spend the lunch hour at home or under other supervision arranged by the parent off the school grounds.

MERRITT BENCH ELEMENTARY SCHOOL DRESS CODE

The clothing that children wear to school should be **appropriate for the weather**, provide protection, allow freedom of movement, and should help students to feel positive about themselves. We encourage outdoor activity all year round and therefore request students arrive at school with appropriate clothing during the different times of the school year. Coats, boots, gloves, and head covering are needed during the winter months.

Students are discouraged from wearing clothing or accessories that would inhibit normal school activities, are a distraction to others, are inappropriate of the age and stage of the child or might be a safety hazard in the school environment.

The following is intended to guide students, parents, and staff:

- Shirts that display rude graphics or promote violence, drugs, alcohol or cigarettes must not be brought to school
- **Hats should not be worn inside the building**—with the exception to school organized themed days. Classroom teachers may have autonomy about hats within their respective classrooms.
- Students are expected to wear hoods down and off their heads.

- Coats, rubber boots and winter boots **should not** be worn inside the school - students are expected to store outerwear in the cloak areas of each classroom.
- Halter tops or skimpy tank tops are not appropriate for normal school wear. No Beach attire and clothing should cover the midriff.
- Skirts, dresses, and shorts should be longer than a student's little finger when the arm is extended straight by ones' side.
- "Flip-flop" sandals or platform shoes are a safety hazard.
- Singlets or muscle shirts are not appropriate for classroom wear.
- Clothing that is excessively torn or dirty may be replaced by lost and found stock at the school.
- As it is unhealthy for children to sit in wet garments, they should have outer clothing that gives protection from the elements.

Jewelry

The wearing of jewelry by students is discouraged. Items of value may become lost or stolen. Rings and earrings are a definite safety hazard when students are engaged in games, sports, and active play. Large or dangling earrings should not be worn. Students participating with school sports teams must remove all the jewelry.

Gym Strip

Please check with your child's class room teacher regarding their gym strip procedures. Students should have appropriate inside shoes to help keep themselves safe in the gym, classroom and hallways. No slippers please.

GUIDELINES FOR PARENTS

It is important that parents feel comfortable about being in the school and approaching the staff. We are all working for the good of the children and we can accomplish a lot when the home and the school are communicating effectively.

Parent's Advisory Council

Merritt Bench has a Parents' Advisory Council (PAC) that meets each month to discuss issues related to the operation of the school. The PAC also acts as a support group for the school functions and helps organize social activities. The meetings of the PAC are open to all parents, and we would like to see as many parents as possible take part.

Parents at School

There will be many opportunities for parents to get involved in activities at the school. We welcome and encourage parents to come to the school and to be on the grounds at any time. It can be a valuable social time for many of you and it is interesting to see your child in another setting. Please don't enter without an appointment.

Custody

School personnel cannot talk to anyone about a student unless that person is listed on the registration form. We rely on parents who have the day-to-day responsibility for the child to inform us if a former spouse or new relationship has permission to act in the role of a parent.

Dropping Off and Meeting Students

The primary teachers would like to encourage parents to leave their children at the outside door to the school. Having many adults in the hallways increases noise and congestion. If you need to talk to your child's teacher, please call to set up a convenient time when you still have his or her full attention.

No Smoking or Vapour Products

There is a ban on smoking vapor product on school grounds in compliance with district Policy and Provincial Legislation. This applies to all adults, including workers, staff, visitors, and parents.

Respect

Profanity, rude language and unkind comments about other adults or children have no place on the school property.

Discipline

Discipline of other children must be left to the school personnel who have the lawful authority to act. If you feel that action is necessary, please see the adult on duty or another member of the staff.

PARENTAL CONCERNS AND RESOLUTION OF DISPUTES

Parents having a concern about classroom practices or their child's educational program **should first** communicate with the teacher involved. If the concern is not resolved at the classroom level, then it is appropriate to go to the principal.

If a concern involves general school operation or policy, **then the Principal** should be

approached directly.

Parents whose concerns are unresolved at the school level may choose to go to the Assistant Superintendent of Schools or express their concerns to the PAC president.

The president of the Parents' Advisory Committee is able to act as a mediator or advocate as required. The President of the PAC may be approached for advice as to appropriate procedure at any stage of the complaint process.

Concerns of a general nature may be brought up by in a PAC meeting. However, issues specific to one student should be handled privately. According to School Board regulations, "confidential matters related to individual personnel and pupils cannot be discussed by the School Consultative Groups".

Where more formal mechanisms for dispute resolution are required, the Board has enacted Policy. These documents are available in the school office.

FIELD TRIP POLICY

Fieldtrips are an important part of our education program. Students are introduced to activities which are not possible in the school setting and information gathered on these trips is used to supplement classroom lessons.

Teachers are expected to keep parents informed about class field trips so that the children may come to school prepared for the trip and so that the parents know where their child is during the school day.

Prior to major outings parents sign a form giving permission for their child to participate on "regular" school journeys. Regular is defined as having no extraordinary risk involved and taking place within the Merritt area during the school day. Special permission forms are required for activities venturing away from Merritt or for overnight trips.

At times, the school may ask for payment to cover entrance fees and transportation. In the case of major trips, students will be expected to participate in fund-raising activities. No student will be prohibited from going on an educational trip due to lack of funds.

In most cases, parents will be welcome to come along to assist the school staff with supervision and organization. The number of seats available for parents will depend on the mode of transportation.

The code of conduct on a school journey is like that of the regular school program. Students are expected to:

- Come prepared both for the weather and for the planned activities

- Pay attention to directions and instructions from adults
- Act in a safe manner while on the journey

Students will not be excluded from out-of-school experiences because of lack of funds. However, staff have the authority to exclude a child from a journey where that child's behavior in class or on previous journeys indicates that behavior or safety may be of concern. In certain cases, teachers may outline conditions which must be met for a child to go on a trip- ie: participation in class or completion of preliminary work. In some circumstances, participation may be determined by a lottery or on a first come basis.

Adult Volunteer Policy

- **All volunteers in a supervisory capacity are required to complete a criminal record check.** Please consider having the criminal record check completed early as completion of the criminal record check can take some time. The CRC is free and can be completed online. Please see the office for details.
- Parents interested in service as volunteers may contact the school principal or classroom teacher. Staff members will select individual volunteers as required.
- Volunteers are considered visitors to the school and must report to the school office on arrival
- Volunteers are expected to take directions from the staff members who requested their service and expectations will be discussed with the staff member in charge.
- The Principal and teachers are responsible for student learning and discipline. Volunteers are responsible for working under the direction of staff to assist in student learning and to provide support during school activities.
- Volunteers must comply with the standards of conduct expected of school staff. Any matter concerning students and staff are confidential and must not be discussed.
- Volunteers will inform staff members if they are unable to attend.
- Volunteers are expected to work within the designated area outlined by the staff member in charge. The staff room is a place for adults only.

Parent Drivers

Parents who volunteer to assist with transportation on field trips must complete a volunteer drivers form. Details regarding minimum insurance coverage, seating and liability are provided on this document. The volunteer driver forms must be completed at the office before any driving can take place. **All volunteers in supervisory capacity (including parent**

drives) are required to complete a criminal record check and have a driver's abstract on file with the school.

Please consider having these documents completed early as completion of the criminal record check can take some time. The CRC is free and can be completed online. Please see the office for details. A driver's abstract may be obtained from your insurance Agent or online and is also free of charge.

STUDENT CLASS PLACEMENT POLICY

The process of making up classes for each school year begins in June and is based on the best information available at that time. The staff of the school meet to go through a process that considers the following factors. This list is **NOT** in priority.

Order:

- Provincial requirements regarding class size and configuration
- The best use of Education Assistants
- The teaching style of the teacher and the learning style of the student
- The number of years the child has been with the teacher
- The child's physical and social maturity
- Male/Female balance in each class
- The balance of leaders and athletes in each class
- The child's interactions with other students
- The child's needs in social, emotional, and behavioral areas
- The child's intellectual development level
- The age of the child
- Student friendships
- The child's need for learning assistance or special education services
- The placement which will afford the child the greatest chance of success
- Siblings in the same class

Note: The number of students in each class is determined by the contract between the teachers and the School District.

The exact teaching assignments for the staff will not be known until September. Students will be told who their new teacher is during the first week back at school. There may be a need to adjust classes through the first few weeks of the term. We are a small school and therefore endure many restrictions when it comes to staffing. We encourage all parents to be patient and understanding when it comes to the placement of their child in a particular class. When it comes time for adjusting, the parent is often the one who has the hardest time. The child makes new friends and bonds with the teacher and is usually fine in a day or so.

VISITOR POLICY

All people who are not either students, parents or guardians must check in at the office as soon as they enter the building.

Parents and volunteers who are working in the building are asked to check in at the office.

Any person found in the building may be expected to be challenged as to their identity and purpose for being here.

Former students are discouraged from being on the grounds during the school day. If they are friends or siblings, they must do so outside after school. In the case of former students wishing to visit a previous teacher – the teacher will be called to the office to meet the visitors – or they will be escorted to that teacher.

The outside playground supervisors or staff on duty will question individuals found on the grounds to determine if they have a legitimate reason for being here. If not, then they will be asked to leave.

In general, we do not allow non-students to be on the grounds between the hours of 8:15 am to 2:45 pm.

Merritt Bench Elementary School is a safe, caring school where we know our rights and take responsibility for our actions. Have a great year everyone!