

Merritt Bench Elementary School

Student/Parent Handbook

2026-2027 School Year

Vision

At Merritt Bench Elementary, we strive to foster a caring and inclusive learning community where students, staff, families, and community members work together to ensure every learner feels valued, connected, and inspired to achieve their personal best. Through meaningful learning experiences and the development of strong character, we strive to empower all learners to succeed today and lead with purpose tomorrow.

Guidelines and Procedures

Bell Schedule/School Hours

8:25	Warning Bell
8:30	School Starts
10:00 – 10:15	Recess Time
10:15-12:00	Instructional Time
12:00-12:20	Student's Eat Lunch
12:20-12:51	Student's Outside Lunch Break <i>*Please note that the office is closed at lunch</i>
2:30	Dismissal

*Please note the office is closed at lunch and front doors are locked

Attendance

We understand that absences are necessary from time to time. To report your child absent, please use the Safe Arrival System, before 8:30am to inform us if your child is going to be away. You can do this by:

1. Download/install and sign-up for the **SchoolMessenger** App from the app store/google play store. Once you have created your account, select **Attendance** then **Report the Absence**. Use the drop-down menu to select your reason for absence.

OR

2. Use the **SchoolMessenger** website at goschoolmessenger.ca. You will need to create an account. Once your account is created, select **Attendance** then **Report the Absence**.

OR

3. Call the toll-free number **1-844-434-8117**.

School Arrival

Students are expected to arrive on time and should not enter the building before the morning bell unless arrangements have been made in advance with school staff (ex. Sports Practice/extra help).

To help ensure student safety, supervision begins at **8:15 a.m.** Once the bell rings students can line up at the outdoor classroom entrance (Kindergarten/Portables) or the side entrance off the primary/intermediate wing, depending on their class assignments.

Late Arrivals/Early Dismissals

If a student arrives after the 8:30 bell, they must enter through the front doors of the school and check in at the office.

If a student is required to leave early – it is important to notify the classroom teacher and the office. Please note that logging an early dismissal in School Messenger does not notify the office/classroom teacher directly. Students are required to check out at the office and leave via the front door for early dismissals.

School Pick-Up

Dismissal is at 2:30 p.m. There are only 15 minutes of formal supervision of students to ensure safe leaving of the school grounds. Students are expected to leave the school grounds promptly and report home. Students who are detained for any reason such as extra help/sports practices (without prior notice/permissions) will be asked to phone home to confirm their late arrival.

Parents should develop procedures for after school with their children. We expect that all children will inform a caregiver if there is any change in their routine.

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 Street by the community tennis courts to ease the traffic in our parking lot. Students are not permitted to ride bikes in the parking lot.

Safety Notes:

- Please do not let children out in the middle of Grimmert Street or block the crosswalk – encourage safe and proper use of the cross walk

- Do not stop to let children out in the front parking lot between Grimmert and the School gym
- No parking at the yellow curbs
- Do not speed through the parking at any time

Contact Information

Please ensure that the school is provided with your most up-to-date contact information. This includes addresses, phone numbers or emergency contact information. In the event of an emergency, it is imperative that we have accurate information.

Leaving School Grounds

We have a closed campus at Merritt Bench and students should not be leaving school grounds unless they have signed permission provided to the office to go home for lunch.

Recess and Lunch

Students are expected to go outside for recess and for the second half of the lunch hour unless otherwise advised due to extreme weather or safety concerns. Students should come prepared for the outdoors/weather; which may include rain, snow, wind, cold/hot temperatures. On inside days, students will be expected to stay in their classroom for quiet activities. *If children are well enough to be at school, they will be expected to go outside for fresh air and exercise at recess/lunch.*

Most 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. Those students who go home for lunch are to leave the grounds promptly by first checking out at the office and are not to return before 12:30pm.

Food brought from home should be ready to eat. We are an allergy-aware school. If your child does have a specific food allergy, please ensure that the office and classroom teachers 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 the lunch hour is provided by Noon Hour Supervisors. Eating lunch at school is a privilege which may be withdrawn. Please see our code of conduct for additional information.

Hot Lunch/Breakfast

Information about the lunch program and breakfast program will be provided to parents by mid-September. Please ensure you are packing your child a lunch/snacks until the programs begin.

If you need to drop off a forgotten lunch for your child, please ensure you check-in at the office and leave the lunch with our school secretary. We will ensure that lunches are delivered to classrooms so as not to disrupt learning/teaching time.

If you are experiencing food security challenges, please connect with the classroom teacher, school secretary, Indigenous Student Advocate, School Principal so that we can come up with a plan/discuss options for support.

Note: we are unable to warm up food for children, but thermos-style containers work well if you'd like to send warm meals.

Dress Code

Students should come to school dressed appropriately for the weather and ready to participate safely and comfortably in all school activities.

Clothing should be suitable for a school setting. Beachwear and clothing with offensive language, images, or messages promoting alcohol, tobacco, vaping, or other drugs are not permitted.

Hoods must remain down in hallways and the gym. Students must also wear indoor shoes in classrooms, hallways and the gym. This helps to protect our floors and prevent slips/falls/injury. Indoor shoes should be supportive and non-slip to ensure safety in the gym. Crocs/sandals and slippers should not be used as indoor shoes. For safety reasons the use of “heelys” (shoes with wheels) are not permitted.

Home/School Communication

Please ensure that if you require a meeting with a teacher you call/email to make an appointment.

The school/classroom teachers often send communication home via email. You may find information about field trips, hot lunch orders, fundraisers, special events, procedural changes, school newsletters, etc. Please also check out our website at <https://mbes.nssd.ca/>. We also have a school Facebook page “Merritt Bench Elementary School” that often has updates and pictures of the fun and learning that happens at our school.

Parent/Guardian Concerns and Complaints

If you have a concern, we follow the School District’s Administrative Procedures (also found on our school district website under Administrative Procedures for “Parent/Guardian Concerns and Complaints”).

Procedures:

1. When there is a concern or complaint about a teacher, the first attempt at resolution is for the parent/guardian to contact the teacher involved.
2. If the concern or complaint has not been resolved after contacting the teacher, the parent/guardian will contact the school administration with their concern or complaint. If the parent/guardian has not spoken with the teacher, the administrator will advise that this is the first step of the process.
3. If the parent refuses to meet with the teacher, the administrator will inform the teacher about the concerns brought forward by the parent/guardian.
4. If the concern or complaint cannot be resolved, the administrator will schedule a meeting with the teacher and the parent/guardian to discuss and attempt to resolve the concern or complaint.
5. If the parent/guardian /teacher/administrator meeting is unable to resolve the concern or complaint, the parent/guardian will then contact the Superintendent or designate.
6. Indigenous parents/guardians may request the support of an Indigenous Support Worker, Education Coordinator, District Principal of Indigenous Education, or advocate at any time during the raising of a complaint or concern.
7. Parents/guardians may request the presence of an advocate at any time.

Student Injury/Illness

The British Columbia School Act gives teachers the responsibility to act in the best interests of students, much like a careful and responsible parent. School staff will provide basic first aid for minor injuries such as cuts, scrapes, and bumps.

If there is any concern about the seriousness of an injury or illness, we will contact a parent, guardian, or designated emergency contact. In the event of a serious injury or medical emergency, such as a head injury, breathing difficulty, suspected broken bone, or other urgent health concern, staff will call 911 immediately and then make every effort to contact a parent, guardian, or emergency contact.

Please ensure your contact information is up to date.

Head Lice

Please check your children's hair for head lice often. If you find lice, please let us know so that we may inform other parents to also check. The interior health website has up to date information about head lice treatment and frequently asked questions.

Administering Medication

Should a child need to take medication at school, we require a signed form by your doctor for any dispensing of medication, **this includes both prescription and non-prescription medication**. In addition, medication should be provided in its original medication bottle indicating the name of the medication and the dosage.

For safety purposes, students should not be storing medication in their backpack/desk or on their person.

Telephone Access

Students must ask their teacher for permission to use the phone. The phone is located at the office. Students are not permitted to call home to arrange play-dates, this should be organized by families outside of school time.

Cell Phone/Personal Devices/Electronics

As stated in our Digital Device Use Policy - student personal digital devices are not permitted, between the hours of 8:25 and 2:30pm unless authorized and supervised by a staff member. This also applies to recess and lunch. During these hours if students have a personal digital device (may include but not limited to: cellular phone, smart watch, tablets, gaming devices or electronic toys, etc), these devices should be turned off and stored in their backpacks.

Students with documented disabilities, unique learning abilities, or health-related requirements will still be able to use personal digital devices in line with their designated support plans or Competency Based IEPs.

Please note that the school cannot be responsible for lost or stolen personal digital devices that are brought to school.

If students cannot abide by this policy, teachers and administrators may use a variety of consequences such as warnings, confiscations, referral to the office, etc. Any urgent communication that needs to take place between home and child between the hours of 8:25am -2:30pm can be done through the school office by calling 250-378-2528.

Toys and Personal Items at School

Toys brought from home often distract from learning and lead to conflicts and/or broken and misplaced items. Toys/precious keepsakes/collectibles are not permitted at school unless they have a teacher's specific permission (Show and tell/theme day in class). If a request is made by the teacher to bring items in, those items are to remain in their classroom/backpack and should not be brought out to the playground.

No weapons (toys/real) are allowed at school. This includes Halloween Costumes – we ask that these accessories be left at home.

Bicycles and Scooters

We are unable to store bicycles and scooters in the school building. Students should walk their bicycles and scooters on the school grounds, and they should be locked/kept at designated bicycle racks. Students riding bicycles are expected to follow the rules of the road including wearing a helmet. The school is not responsible for lost or stolen items.

Rollerblades, skateboards, scooters, and bicycles are not permitted to be used on school grounds during the school day.

Lost and Found

Children are encouraged to take care of their own personal belongings. However, from time to time clothing and other items tend to find their way to the lost and found area located near the office at the front of the school. We encourage you to label your child's items with first name and initial to ensure that lost items can make their way back to them.

Books/Library.

Students will be encouraged to sign out library books during scheduled school library visits. In addition, our primary reading program will encourage students to bring home books at their level to read. It is important that all books brought home from the school are treated with care and students are responsible for ensuring that books borrowed are returned in a timely manner.

Parent Volunteers and Participation at School

There will be many opportunities for parents to get involved in activities at the school. At Merritt Bench, we encourage Parent Volunteers for field trips, primary reading program and other events that may come up.

- **All volunteers are required to complete a criminal record check (CRC).**
- Parents/Guardians/Caregivers interested in volunteer opportunities can reach out to the office. Please check in with our school secretary.
- Staff members will select volunteers as required.
- Volunteers are considered visitors to the school and must check in at the office upon arrival.
- The principal and teachers are responsible for student learning and discipline. Volunteers are responsible for working under the direction of staff to assist students.

Should problems arise, please ensure you connect with the supervising staff.

- All classroom volunteers must keep student, staff, and school-related information strictly confidential. Volunteers are expected to follow the same confidentiality standards as school staff.
- Volunteers will inform staff if they are unable to attend a previously organized event/activity.
- Parents who volunteer to assist with transportation for sports/field trips must complete a volunteer driver form. Details regarding minimum insurance coverage, seating and liability can be obtained from the office. All volunteers in supervisory capacity (Including drivers) must complete the criminal record check and have a driver's abstract on file with the school to be renewed annually.

If you think you will be volunteering either within the school or as a driver for sporting events/field trips – we recommend getting all paperwork completed early, as the CRC can take time to come through.

Student Class Placement Procedures

The process of creating classes for each school year begins in June and is based on the best information available at that time. School staff work collaboratively to create classes that support student success, considering a variety of factors, including student learning needs, Ministry and contractual requirements, and social and emotional considerations.

While the number of classes is determined by enrollment and staffing allocations, exact teaching assignments are not always finalized before the start of the school year. Students will be informed of their teacher during the first week of school.

As enrollment can change throughout the opening weeks of September, adjustments to class placements may sometimes be necessary. As a smaller school, we have limited flexibility with staffing, and combined-grade classes are often an important part of how we organize students.

We appreciate your patience and understanding as we work to create balanced, supportive learning environments for all students. We encourage families to help their children understand that class placements are made with great care and consideration. While changes can sometimes occur, students quickly build new friendships, connections, and a strong sense of belonging within their class community.

Visitor Policy

To help keep our school safe, all visitors, including parents, guardians, and volunteers, must check in at the office upon entering the building. Anyone on school grounds may be asked to identify themselves and explain the purpose of their visit.

Former students should not visit during the school day. Those wishing to see a former teacher must check in at the office first.

In general, non-students are not permitted on school grounds between 8:30 a.m. and 2:30 p.m. unless they are signed in through the office or attending an approved school activity.

Emergency Procedures

Regular practice of emergency procedures takes place within the course of the school year. Students will learn about safety drills such as fire drills, earthquake drills, lockdown drills and how to evacuate in the case of unforeseen circumstances (ex. Natural disasters). Students and staff take these drills seriously so that we can be prepared and ensure safety if needed. Parents/Guardians will be contacted should a real emergency occur.

Parent Advisor Council (PAC)

Merritt Bench has a Parent's Advisory Council (PAC) that meets on the first Tuesday of each month to provide a voice to parents. The PAC also acts as support to school functions and helps organize social activities and fundraising opportunities. PAC meetings are open to all parents. Please consider joining PAC!