A profile of The Grace School, one of the lowest costing private schools in Rhode Island. By Susan Gale

When someone says Meeting Street, what do you think about?

A telethon?
A school for children with special needs?
One of the lowest costing private schools in the state for students without special needs?
Perhaps that third one comes as a surprise to you but it’s true. Over its 70-year history, Meeting Street has grown in all sorts of ways. One of them is The Grace School – a K-8 inclusive private school with a $9,700 annual price tag – making it significantly lower than many other private schools.

A school where everyone knows your child

With 111 students, classrooms at The Grace School are one-third children with special needs and two-thirds children without specific special needs. This creates a perfect situation to help all children develop empathy and compassion for others, said Head of School Margaret Knowlton.

“As a school, we want to turn out students who are smart. We also need people who are going to go out and be good people,” she said. “Sometimes you can lose kids in middle school. Empathy is not automatic, but we share the values of respect and compassion here and when they leave and go into high school, they take those values with them.”

Students from The Grace School often move on to high schools such as La Salle Academy, Bishop Hendricken High School, Classical High School, and Saint Raphael Academy, said Cecilia Pirotto, Director of Marketing.
In terms of the difference between teaching children with special needs and those without, Knowlton said, “If you can’t do it for all kids, you probably shouldn’t do it.”

“We follow a rigorous general education program. Teachers are really good in how they modify that and make it make sense for each child,” she said. “Because we are always about individual needs, we are able to do that for everyone – individualize. We are a school where everyone knows your child.”

Focused on both academics and social-emotional competencies, the school follows the Responsive Classroom® approach, a set of practices and strategies that build both academic and social-emotional competencies based on the belief that this creates the best learning environment.

Each classroom has at least two teachers and most have no more than 16 students. The teachers are dual-certified for teaching children with special needs and those without special needs. In addition, specialists come into the classroom in areas such as reading. This creates an individualized learning atmosphere in the classroom, said Knowlton.

“They follow a workshop model. Teaches do small group and individual instruction and bring it together when it makes sense for whole group instruction,” she said.

At The Grace School, afterschool activities are included in the price. Just about everything is included in the tuition except the cost of uniforms, said Director of Marketing Pirotto.

With a 9-acre Meeting Street campus in Providence, The Grace School takes advantage of multiple facilities including a small pool, a gym, and accessible playground. Meeting Street is currently building out a new classroom building and an accessible track and field area in order to bring about more sports possibilities.

The Grace School also offers many different kinds of devices that help children learn such as a room filled with new computers and a video lab where children can take part in a digital media club.
Student’s view

The school offers unique ways for students to work together. For instance, when running for student government, students run in pairs – one with special needs and one without special needs.

“You get to meet new people and make a lot of friends even friends with disabilities. I have a nice friend that controls his wheelchair with his head,” said 7th grader Angelika Moquete. “I like the diversity [the school] has. It doesn’t matter if you are disabled or not.”

Carlos Luna, also in 7th grade, said he reads 20 books every year as part of school. “It’s new types of books that I’m not used to reading,” he said, noting that he is currently reading Orbiting Jupiter, a novel about a teen father who is searching for his daughter.

Applications are open

The school is looking for 15 new students without special needs to start in the 2019-2020 school year. The entrance is competitive with academic screenings completed by potential students. A committee then reviews potential students and offers acceptance letters. Learn more and apply here.

Meeting Street also offers the following schools and services:

Early intervention and other programs, some home based, in Rhode Island and Massachusetts.
An Early Learning Center for children six weeks to five years.
A state-funded Pre-K program.
A small high school for students with special needs called The Carter School.
A Providence Mayoral Academy for grades K-2 called The Hope Academy with students who are chosen by lottery.
The Schwartz Center, a special needs school in Massachusetts.

They have the Providence campus at 1000 Eddy Street, as well as: The Schwartz Center at One Posa Place, Dartmouth, MA 02747, (508) 996-3391; and an early intervention office at 543 North Street, New Bedford. MA 02740, (508) 996-3391.

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