



St Mary's
Colchester

St Mary's Kindergarten Parents' Handbook 2023-24

Welcome

At St Mary's we are committed to ensuring the happiness of every one of the children in our care. We firmly believe that our children flourish when their individual talents are recognised and nurtured and when they have confidence and self-belief.

We encourage every child in our Kindergarten to embrace the opportunities we offer. Our programme of activities supports the children's development as well-rounded, confident individuals, prepared to face the challenges of school. We believe that we offer a unique curriculum that incorporates specialist teaching to underpin the children's learning experiences. It is crucial for parents and the school to work in partnership to ensure that each child makes the most of the time they spend with us in Kindergarten.

This Parents' Handbook is designed to give information on the day-to-day organisation of St Mary's Kindergarten. If you have any queries please do not hesitate to contact me, or speak directly to Suzy Violet, Kindergarten Manager.

MRS EMMA STANHOPE

Head of Lower School

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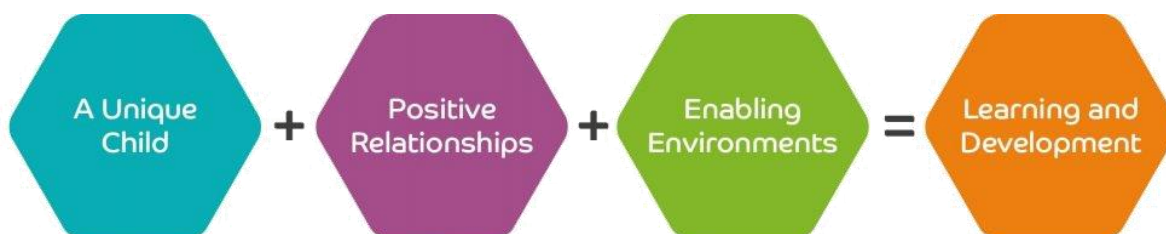
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Academic curriculum

The Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum begins in the Kindergarten and transitions through to the end of the Prep (Reception) year. It is built upon the following principles:



A Unique Child

In this complex and rapidly changing world we are unable to predict what challenges children will face in their futures. Therefore, the best preparation we can give them in their early years is to provide living experiences of making choices, innovating, taking responsibility, facing challenge, thinking flexibly and critically, and learning how to learn so that they will be able to respond to their unfolding futures.

At St Mary's we want the children in our care to feel safe within warm, loving and caring relationships. Only when a child's basic emotional needs are met will they relax and move into exploring, taking risks, making discoveries, and experiencing the deep involvement through which they learn. The Kindergarten Practitioners help the children to feel confident, and at ease by providing an environment that meets their need for tenderness and affection, relaxation, inner peace, enjoyment, openness, safety and belonging. The Kindergarten Practitioners provide an enabling environment which allow the children to play and explore, respecting their ideas, autonomy and interests. The children enjoy following their own curiosity and finding their own challenges. They are given opportunities to explore the world and their imaginations, and to embrace new experiences through open-ended activities.

Within the Kindergarten we recognise that every child brings with them a rich heritage. Their homes, families, life experiences and beliefs provide the foundations to their identity. This allows us to share wonderful opportunities to learn, celebrate and embrace each other's differences.

Positive Relationships

At St Mary's we recognise the importance of working together to ensure the best outcomes for your child. Research tells us that the most important predictor of children's future outcomes is the quality of the home learning environment, so involving you the parent, in your child's learning is the most significant factor in enabling your child to do well.

Every child and family in our care are unique and special to us.

On entry to the Kindergarten setting it is important that we get to know about your child. This is the start of us working together, sharing information that we can use to help form your child's learning journey. We love to celebrate a child's achievement, be it completing a small jigsaw puzzle to being independent in hanging up their coat.

Once your child has settled in the Kindergarten a Key Person will be allocated to them. They will help your child to feel known, understood, cared about, and safe. The Kindergarten Practitioner will introduce themselves to you and they will be your reassuring point of contact whilst your child remains at our setting. The Kindergarten Practitioners are privileged to be able to share in the development of your children, having opportunities to celebrate moments of joy with you.

Enabling Environments

At St Mary's the enabling environment is very important to us. We want the children in our care to experience the real physical and natural world, as well as the social world. We want to provide routine and adult involvement which allows support for development and learning that may be planned or may arise informally. We particularly want the children to develop a love of the natural outdoor environment.

The Kindergarten Practitioners provide opportunities for negotiation and collaboration with other children to allow for your child's communication, language and social skills to develop. They provide open-ended play opportunities which allows their imagination and creativity to flourish. They give the children time to be in the different environments so they can explore and develop a sense of self. The Kindergarten Practitioners will also provide opportunities for children to challenge their own emotional, social, physical and cognitive abilities and allow them to take risks.

Outdoor Learning/Forest School

At St Mary's the children are privileged to have lots of open outdoor space to explore and learn in. They are able to experience the natural world as they feel weather, hear sounds in nature as well as experience the changes in natural light. Our children have the unique opportunity to spend quality time outside in the natural environment. They learn to challenge themselves, take risks and develop new skills. Time outdoors also benefits their health and wellbeing. By experiencing first-hand, the children begin to make sense of the world, and to learn to care for their environment.

The natural environment also supports their imaginative play and the development of relationships, encouraging collaboration with others. The children begin to develop flexible thinking. Challenging activities across the curriculum, also allows them to develop their thinking and problem-solving skills. The fantastic outdoor learning space allows the children to be inspired, to help them develop their interests and curiosities, encourage questioning, awe and wonder, and sustained shared thinking.

Learning and Development

To learn well, children must approach opportunities with curiosity, energy and enthusiasm. Learning must be meaningful to a child, so that they can use what they have learnt and apply it in new situations. These abilities and attitudes of strong learners will support them to learn well and make good progress in all the Areas of Learning and Development.

Prime Areas

There are three Prime Areas;

- Personal, social and emotional development (PSED)
- Communication and language (CL)
- Physical development (PD)

These areas are crucial in the first three years of child development. It is through these aspects that a child accesses the world around them and relationships with other people, which in turn opens the door to learning in all areas.

The specific areas through which the three Prime Areas are strengthened and applied are;

- Literacy
- Mathematics
- Understanding the World
- Expressive Arts and Design

These specific areas of learning provide children with a broad curriculum and with opportunities to strengthen and apply the Prime Areas of learning. This is particularly important in developing language and extending vocabulary. At St Mary's we understand that each everyday experience is an occasion for holistic development and learning. All spheres of development and learning are in action at the same time, which can be seen in the example opposite.

Characteristics of Effective Learning

In planning and guiding the children's activities, the Kindergarten Practitioners focus on the Characteristics of Effective Learning and reflect these in their practice and assessment processes:

- Playing and exploring – children investigate and experience, and 'have a go'
- Active learning – children concentrate and keep trying if they encounter difficulties, and enjoy achievements
- Creating and thinking critically – children have and develop their own ideas, make links between ideas, and develop strategies for carrying out tasks

Planning, Observation and Assessment

At St Mary's each child will have their own unique pathway of learning. Daily interactions involve observing, reflecting and deciding how best to support your child. At key points, whilst your child is with us, the Practitioner will reflect on their learning pathway, creating a summary of your child's development, learning and progress. A holistic summary will give attention to knowledge and skills, your child's emotional wellbeing and connections, and to the development of their attitudes for learning.

Example: Investigating bugs

<p>Personal Social Emotional Development Express a wide range of feeling in their interactions with others and through their behaviour and play Enjoy a sense of belonging through being involved in daily activities Seek out companionship with adults and other children, sharing experiences and play ideas</p>	<p>Communication and Language Use intonation, rhythm and phrasing to make the meaning clear to others Use talk to explain what is happening and anticipate what might happen next Use language to share feelings, experiences and thoughts</p>
<p>Physical Development Show increasing control in holding, using and manipulating a range of tools Show preference for dominant hand Show increasing control in holding, using and manipulating a range of tools and objects such as mark making Hold mark-making tools with thumb and all fingers</p>	<p>Literacy Enjoy drawing and writing on paper/gives meaning to their drawings or paintings Include mark making and early writing in their play Know that print carries meaning Know information can be relayed in through signs and symbols</p>
<p>Mathematics Explore differences in size</p>	<p>Understanding the World Show care and concern for living things and the environment Notice detailed features of objects in the environment Talk about things they have observed</p>
<p>Expressive Arts and Design Play alongside other children engaged in the same theme Develop an understanding of using lines to enclose a space, and begins to use drawing to represent actions and objects based on imagination, observations and experience</p>	<p>Characteristics of Effective Learning Playing and exploring: Showing curiosity Using senses to explore the world around them Engaging in open-ended activity Showing particular interests Active Learning: Maintaining focus on an activity for a period of time Showing high levels of involvement, energy and fascination Paying attention to detail</p>

Specialist sessions

Music

Singing and music form part of everyday life in the Kindergarten. However, a weekly music session is led by the school's qualified music teacher and involves the children learning new songs as well as recalling nursery rhymes and playing percussion instruments.

French

The older children within the setting take part in fun, interactive sessions led by the school's specialist French teacher, giving the children an introduction to a foreign language.

Cooking

Children develop their communication skills and fine motor skills as well as using the language associated with weighing and measuring in the weekly cooking session.

Ballet

Our professional ballet teacher engages the children in dance, developing gross motor skills. Taking place in the Dance Studio, the children enjoy learning to interpret the music.

PE

PE sessions in the School Hall, on the sports courts and playing fields introduce the children to activities designed to develop their gross motor skills and spatial awareness and improve their balance. The children also learn about the importance of fitness and staying healthy.

Pastoral care

In our friendly, warm community, each child is known, valued and cared for as a unique individual. The Kindergarten Practitioners are dedicated to meeting the needs of each and every child and it is our intention that the children in our care have a happy experience and move on to school with confidence and the necessary skills.

Key Person

Once your child has settled in the Kindergarten a Key Person will be allocated to them. They will help your child to feel known, understood, cared about, and safe. The Kindergarten Practitioner will introduce themselves to you and they will be your reassuring point of contact whilst your child remains at our setting. The Kindergarten Practitioners are privileged to be able to share in the development of your children, having opportunities to celebrate moments of joy with you.

Behaviour Policy

The school's Behaviour Policy outlines expectations of children's behaviour and can be found on the school website and via the Hub in the St Mary's app . Its main aims are:

- For every member of our school community to be happy, valued and respected, and to be treated fairly.
- To have high expectations, appropriate to their developmental years, of children's behaviour and to ensure that all children work to the best of their ability.
- To foster self-discipline through positive encouragement and reward.

The children in Kindergarten are expected to work towards the few 'school rules' that we have in place at St Mary's. These are regularly reinforced in Kindergarten. They are:

- Treat people as you want to be treated.
- Make Kindergarten a safe and happy place.
- Be polite, show respect and be helpful at all times.
- Wear the correct school uniform.
- Walk quietly and sensibly around the school.

We aim to provide a caring, friendly and safe environment, ensuring the wellbeing of all members of the community. Children have the right to feel and be safe at school.

The school day

7.30am	The Kindergarten day begins for those who have an early start
8.00am	Kindergarten children who have an early start are taken to the School Hall to have breakfast
8.30am	Start of the Core Day session
9.00am	Once all the children have been welcomed into the setting, activities (adult or children-led) begin
10.15am	Morning snack
11.45am	Children get ready for lunchtime – they join the rest of the Infant department in the School Hall
12.30pm	Morning session ends and afternoon session begins
3.00pm	Afternoon snack
3.30pm	End of core day, afternoon session ends, wrap-around care begins
4.30pm	Extended stay 1 finishes
6.00pm	Extended stay 2 finishes

Lunchtimes

Our catering contractor, Holroyd Howe, provides the children with a two-course lunch. Kindergarten children also have a morning and afternoon snack. Meals are varied and nutritionally balanced.

Weekly menus can be found on the St Mary's app for current parents or in the parents portal on our website www.stmaryscolchester.org.uk/current-parents. If your child has any dietary requirements, please notify the school in writing so that we can make sure that suitable food is provided.

Wrap-around care

A minimum of 24 hours notice is required for those wanting an early start or extended stay until 4.30pm. A minimum of 48 hours notice is required for those wanting an extended stay until 6pm.

Completed booking forms need to be handed to the Lower School office. Bookings are dependent on whether spaces are available.

Communications and events

At St Mary's we pride ourselves on excellent communication with parents.

Key Person

Your child's Key Person will introduce themselves to you and will be your reassuring point of contact whilst your child remains at our setting. Kindergarten Practitioners are available at the start and end of the day to speak to parents, if needed. Parents who wish to have a longer meeting should arrange this through the Kindergarten Manager as child to adult ratios must be adhered to at all times in the setting.

School records

It is important that school records are complete and up to date, in the event that parents need to be contacted urgently. Please notify the Kindergarten Manager if there are any changes.

Tapestry

It is important for us to share with you how your child is progressing in the Kindergarten. The online learning programme Tapestry is a two-way system which gives parents the opportunity to see what their child has been learning. It also allows you the opportunity to share key moments with us. This creates a rounded picture of your child's learning and development.

Parents' Evening

You will have the opportunity to formally meet with your child's Key Person twice a year. The meeting will focus on your child's learning and development progress. Next steps learning targets will also be shared at the meetings.

Email communications

Correspondence between Kindergarten and parents is via the St Mary's app or text message. Messages may require a 'click response'. The School Office staff are happy to help with any difficulties. Any email communications should go via the St Mary's app messages for current parents to Lower School Office – St Mary's or lowerschool@stmaryscolchester.org.uk

School App

St Mary's has a school app through which parents are sent communications such as calendar dates, notices, school trip messages and news stories. Parents are able to contact relevant staff directly through the messaging system on the app.

Website

The school website is a great source of information on all sections of St Mary's School. It also includes school policies and the latest news.

The Parents Portal can be found at www.stmaryscolchester.org.uk/current-parents and contains useful information such as school day timings, key dates, menus, uniform guide and online shop, curriculum and news. This information can also be accessed via the St Mary's app for parents when their child joins Kindergarten.

Social Media

You can follow us on Twitter (@stmaryscolch), Facebook (Stmaryslowerschoolcolchester) and Instagram (@Stmaryscolchester)

PTA

St Mary's has an active Parent Teacher Association, which organises at least one social or fundraising event for the whole school each term. Membership of the PTA is automatic and parents are kept informed via the newsletter and by letter, of the various PTA events.

Parents who would like to help organise PTA events are encouraged to join the PTA committee, who can be contacted by emailing sms.colchester.pta@gmail.com The committee meets on one evening each half term to plan events.

Key events

We enjoy welcoming friends and family members into school on a regular basis for events. These include performances such as the Nativity, outdoor theatre production, Sports Day for the older Kindergarten children, PTA events such as Fireworks Night and our annual Prize Giving celebrations. Details of events are communicated via the St Mary's app.

Drop-off, collection and visiting

We appreciate parents' courtesy when bringing their children to Kindergarten, collecting them or visiting during the school day.

Visiting the school during working hours

During the school day, all visitors (including parents) must ring on the main school gate and wait to be given further instructions by the office staff. This is crucial to ensure the children's safety.

Parking

The car park has been designed to ensure that traffic flows well at busy times. It is extremely important that parents drive very slowly and carefully while on the school site, for the safety of the children and other parents.

The drop-off area is for those dropping off children entering the school independently and should not be used for parking.

Procedure if you are late or not able to collect you child

Parents who know they will be late to collect their son or daughter from Kindergarten should contact the Kindergarten or Lower School Office as soon as possible so that the child may be reassured.

If a child is to be collected by someone other than the usual adult, it is vitally important that Kindergarten, or the Lower School Office, is informed as soon as possible so that the correct information is at hand at the end of the Kindergarten day.

If a child has not been collected at the end of the day the Kindergarten staff will attempt to contact the child's parent or carer to ascertain that whereabouts of the adult collecting.

If a parent or carer cannot be contacted, Kindergarten staff will call the second contact.

If a child is not collected after one hour of waiting and none of the contacts can be reached, the Kindergarten staff will apply the procedures for an 'uncollected child.' The Late and Non Collections policy can be found on the school website.

Absence and medical

We appreciate the co-operation from parents in following our absence and medical guidelines.

If your child is unwell

Parents are asked to telephone the Kindergarten by 9.30am if their child is unwell and will not be attending Kindergarten.

In order to minimise the opportunity for infection within the Kindergarten, please keep your child off for 48 hours if they have vomited or have had diarrhoea.

A child starting a course of antibiotics must also be absent for 48 hours (unless this is part of an ongoing care plan to treat individual medical conditions e.g. asthma and the child is not unwell). This is because it is important that children are not subjected to the rigours of the Kindergarten day, which requires socialising with other children and being part of a group setting, when they have first become ill and require a course of antibiotics.

Illness at Kindergarten

A child who is ill during the school day will be isolated from the other children and parents will be contacted to collect.

Other absences

Parents are asked to notify the Kindergarten Manager if their child is to be absent from Kindergarten for any other reason, so that a note can be made on the register.

Medicines

Only medication prescribed by a doctor may be administered in Kindergarten. The medicine must be handed directly to a Kindergarten Practitioner and a permission form must be completed. Parents should collect medication either at the end of each day or at the end of the course of treatment. Please note that a child taking antibiotics must be absent from Kindergarten for 48 hours to allow for the medicine to work.

Medical needs

The parent of a child who requires an inhaler or an epi-pen must submit a Health, Care Plan. These can be obtained via your doctor.

Uniform

Children in all sections of the school at St Mary's wear the uniform with pride and enjoy the sense of belonging it brings.

Kindergarten uniform

The Kindergarten uniform is practical, easy to care for, smart and stylish. As well as the sense of belonging it brings, the uniform also makes life easier for parents!

Either the summer or winter uniform can be worn for the first half of the autumn term and the summer term. The winter uniform only should be worn from the second half of the autumn term until the end of the spring term.

Uniform guide

Our Uniform Guide will be sent as soon as the final new uniform lists are confirmed and will then be available in the St Mary's app and on our website.

We will specify which items can be ordered online through School Colours and which can be purchased elsewhere and will note where items are optional.

Transition to the Lower School

St Mary's Lower School consistently ranks as one of the top performing Prep Schools in the country. Many of the girls in our Preparatory Class (Reception) progress from our Kindergarten and their familiarisation with the setting, staff and events help make the transition as seamless as possible.

Registering for a place at the Lower School

It is very important that Kindergarten parents complete a Lower School registration form as soon as possible as places in our Preparatory Class are limited.

Offers of places are made in the December prior to entry the following September and must be accepted by parents by the deadline specified in the offer letter and which follows National Primary School Offer Day.

Familiarisation sessions

Once a place is accepted, Kindergarten children making the transition to the Preparatory Class take part in a series of familiarisation sessions designed to introduce the Preparatory Class and staff. In the summer term, the Preparatory Class teacher also holds informal meetings with parents in preparation for their daughter starting school.

Policies, complaints, staff and Governors

School policies are available on the school website at www.stmarycolchester.org.uk or via the St Mary's app.

If you require a hard copy, please speak to a member of the Lower School Office staff.

Complaints

At St Mary's we pride ourselves on our 'open door' policy and parents' concerns are usually dealt with in an informal way. However, if you feel you have a complaint, please follow the school's complaints procedure which can be found on the school website www.stmarycolchester.org.uk or via the St Mary's app.

Key staff and Governors

A full and up-to-date list of staff and Governors can be found on the school website www.stmaryscolchester.org.uk or in the St Mary's app.

Acting Chair of Governors: Mrs Mel Loxley and Mr Graeme Lambert

Principal: Mrs Nicola Griffiths, MA, PGCE, NPQH

Head of Lower School: Mrs E Stanhope, G Mus PGCE NPQH

Head of Senior School: Miss A Jones, BEd (Hons) NPQH

Head of Finance and Operations: Mrs Elizabeth Bevan, BSc, ACA

Contact us

Lower School Office: via the St Mary's app messages for current parents to Lower School Office – St Mary's or lowerschool@stmaryscolchester.org.uk, or on 01206 211242

Senior School Office: via the St Mary's app messages for current parents to Senior School Office – St Mary's or seniorschool@stmaryscolchester.org.uk, or on 01206 572544

Finance: accounts@stmaryscolchester.org.uk, 01206 572544

Registrar, Justine Tierney: registrar@stmaryscolchester.org.uk, 01206 594256

St Mary's Kindergarten and Lower School: 247 London Road, Copford, Colchester, Essex, CO3 8LT

St Mary's Senior School: 91 Lexden Road, Colchester, Essex, CO3 3RB