

st
Mary's
Pre-school

Welcome to
St. Mary's Pre-School
Horsham



Prospectus
2024/25

Hello and welcome!

We are very pleased to have the opportunity through this prospectus to outline the work we do at St. Mary's Pre-School and explain how we care for young children. If you have any questions or would like more information on any aspect of pre-school life, do please contact us and we'll be happy to talk to you.

In this prospectus you'll find information on our background, aims and ethos, and the curriculum we follow, along with practical matters such as our daily routines.



Our background

St Mary's Pre-School was established in 2002 by St. Mary's Church – the parish church in the centre of Horsham. We offer a caring, fun and stimulating pre-school environment for children aged from two years and three months to five years of age. We seek to value each child as a unique individual, and to help children grow in the love and knowledge of Christ as a member of a caring, Christian community. We actively welcome children from other faiths and cultures, and encourage an atmosphere of respect for the beliefs and customs of others.

Just like schools, we are regulated by Ofsted. Ofsted looks not only at education, but also at the overall safety and welfare of children in our care. Our last Ofsted inspection was in September 2018 these comments come from the report:

“Personal development & welfare are outstanding”

“Children develop exceptional social skills”

“They share & take turns without prompting & are incredibly kind to one another”

Ofsted Report September 2018

You can request a copy of the report from the Pre-School or it can be found on the Ofsted website (www.ofsted.gov.uk – ref EY387285).

St. Mary's Pre-School and St. Mary's Church organise many activities together and we take the children regularly for services. We have strong links with nearby St Mary's Primary School but, although many of our children do go on to St. Mary's Primary School, others go on to many other schools across the Horsham area. Admission to St. Mary's Pre-School does not guarantee a place at St. Mary's Primary School, which has its own admissions criteria. Please contact the school directly for further information.



Our aims

“We aim to provide fully inclusive Early Years education of the highest quality, based on caring Christian values; to recognise and celebrate the unique strengths of each child and support their development in a broad, balanced and holistic way; to welcome and support parents and families; to nurture the individual and collective professional development of our team; and to share our ethos and expertise with the wider community”.

This – our official “mission statement” – expresses the ways in which we seek to provide the best possible early experiences for children. It translates into the following approach to caring for your child:

- Providing a secure, welcoming environment
- Encouraging children to develop confidence and self-esteem
- Challenging and stimulating children so that they become resourceful, independent learners
- Treating children and adults with warmth, kindness and compassion
- Valuing and including all children irrespective of faith, background, ability or additional needs
- Guiding children so that they develop respect for the ideas, attitudes, beliefs, feelings and values of others
- Helping children develop positive relationships with others
- Giving children an understanding of Christian values through guidance, opportunities for worship, and through example



Our ethos

At St. Mary's Pre-School, we believe in learning through play – and these are not just glib words. Our work centres on playing. This might be individual play, group play, adult-initiated, child-initiated, messy or quiet, but it is always recognised for what it is: the business of exploring the world on the child's own terms. This vital aspect of early education is increasingly recognised throughout the UK as the rock upon which successful later learning stands.

We take great pleasure in giving children as wide a range of play opportunities as possible. We encourage children to build on their natural curiosity and, as a team, we carefully identify each child's needs, interests, style of learning and developing skills.

Christian worship is an integral part of our ethos and we encourage children to learn about Christianity in a variety of ways, from exploring Bible stories with puppets to running pancake races for Shrove Tuesday and holding celebration services throughout the year. We also give children the opportunity to learn about other faiths and cultures – for example by making Diwali lamps or finding out about traditional Chinese New Year celebrations.

We warmly welcome children with additional needs. These may range from slight speech and language delay to significant physical and/or learning disabilities. As a staff we have a great deal of experience in this area, and a strong commitment to supporting families who are caring for children with additional needs. In addition to offering practical and moral support to families and to individual children, we liaise with outside agencies such as speech & language therapists, health services and the Education Authority as appropriate, and are happy to take on an advocacy role where this is helpful. Naturally, all work in this area is undertaken with complete confidentiality. We work hard to ensure that equal opportunities prevail within our pre-school, and actively promote caring and inclusive behaviour within the pre-school.

What will your child do at St. Mary's Pre-School?

At St. Mary's Pre-School, we follow the Early Years Foundation Stage. This covers the age range 0-5 years and provides not only a curriculum but an overall approach to early learning. The Early Years Foundation Stage seeks to combine early education with children's overall health and wellbeing. There are seven defined (but interlinking) curriculum areas:

Three prime areas (fundamental areas which support development in all other areas)

- Personal social and emotional development
- Communication and language
- Physical development

Four specific areas (specific skills and knowledge for children to participate successfully in society)

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

Within pre-school, we gently encourage each child to access all areas of the curriculum through play situations and activities with which they feel comfortable. An example of this might be using a clipboard and marker pen outside or whilst playing in the home corner or with the train set, rather than sitting at the "literacy table". We support the children as they develop the characteristics of effective learning.

The Characteristics of effective learning

The ways in which a child engages with other people and their environment underpin learning and development across all the above areas and support the child to remain an effective and motivated learner. They are playing and exploring; active learning; creating and thinking critically

If you would like to know more about the Early Years Foundation Stage, and have internet access, you may like to visit

www.foundationyears.org.uk/files/2014/08/EYFS_Parents_Guide-amended.pdf

Alternatively, we will be happy to lend you one of our copies of the current materials or have a chat with you in pre-school.

Everyday activities

So, how does this rather formal-sounding “curriculum” translate into a typical day at pre-school? You will find that your child is free to access a wide range of activities including construction toys; sand and/or water play; painting and crafts; small world activities such as trains, cars and dolls’ houses; books; music, singing, dancing and performing; chatting with adults and other children; ICT equipment including supervised age-appropriate computer games; a programmable robot and microscope; physical play both inside and out; “writing” and drawing equipment including chalk, pens, crayons and markers; imaginative and role-play equipment such as dressing-up clothes, the home corner and the ever-popular puppet theatre. Children have lots of opportunities to take part in baking, cooking and other “real life” activities such as visiting the local café or posting letters. We regularly invite visitors to share their experiences with our children – such as pilots, the fire brigade, policemen and vets.

We are fortunate to have a safely enclosed, level garden with a large lawn and a paved area. We use this area every day (unless unsafe to do so) for group games and free play with equipment such as mud kitchen, gutters, ride-on cars, hoops, the see-saw, the sand pit and the climbing frame. We play lots of traditional games such as *What’s the time, Mr. Wolf?* Running around time is a crucial element of a happy morning or afternoon at St. Mary’s Pre-School.

A typical session will include free play inside and out; the opportunity to take part in pre-planned activities such as model-making or hand-printing; music time; snack time and story time. Music time and story time provide an opportunity to practice sitting in a group while snack time gives us a chance to have a chat to our key person. We seek to achieve a balance between planned, adult-initiated activities and those inspired by the children’s own ideas and interests.



How each day is organised

The pre-school day starts at 8.30am. We have self registration and then planned activities such as making play-dough are offered alongside free play. We have music time, which could include songs, rhymes, playing instruments and dancing followed by snack time where children are encouraged to drink milk or water and eat some fruit, vegetable or breadsticks. Water is available in case children are thirsty at any other time. Snack time is followed by further free play and planned activities. At the end of the morning we will tidy up together and have story time or occasionally a large group activity such as pancake races. The children learn to put their own coats and bags on and we sit together ready to be collected at 11.30am.

Our Lunch Club runs from 11.30am until 12.30pm. This session is not covered by the free entitlement and a charge is therefore made. The children have a short play outside or an activity in the classroom while the morning only children leave and other children arrive. They will then wash their hands and sit down together to eat their packed lunch brought from home. We allow plenty of time for eating in a relaxed, carefully supervised way. Staff eat with the children to create a friendly, “family” atmosphere.

Afternoon sessions, run from 12.30 to 3.30pm. These are sessions just for the children who will start school the following September. The children have the opportunity to take part in more challenging activities in the afternoon sessions, such as investigating shadows or how to stop ice from melting. We finish the afternoon with a snack, a Spanish lesson and a large group activity such as a puppet show or skittles game followed by a story.



Forest School

For the academic year in which they turn 4, children are offered a weekly forest school session. Forest School is an inspirational process that offers children regular opportunities to achieve and develop confidence and self-esteem through hands on learning experiences in a woodland setting. At St Mary's Pre-School one of our aims is to "support children's development in a broad, balanced and holistic way" and we believe that Forest School is a perfect way to achieve this. Forest School takes place outside whatever the weather (other than when it is blowing a gale or there is a thunderstorm) and children will have the opportunity to experience woodland crafts, art and drama, storytelling, outdoor cooking, natural history, games and teamwork activities, and generally gain a closer connection with the natural environment. An important aspect is to enable children to acquire age/experience appropriate skills including keeping safe in the outdoor environment, using hand tools for crafts and the safe use of fire.

If you would like to learn more about Forest School there is plenty of information on the internet – a good place to start is the Forest School Association website:

www.forestscholassociation.org/whatisforestschool/

This gives plenty of evidence as to the benefits and ethos of Forest School.

For our Forest School sessions we generally go to a fixed site and set up a safe area where the children can play and explore. On some occasions we will take the children for a walk to explore other areas. The ratios of adults to children are very high for these sessions to ensure the safety of the children and we would be grateful if you could offer to help with sessions on a rota basis.

Our routines

Fruit for snack-times

Families asked to bring some fruit or savoury snacks such as breadsticks each day for sharing at snack time, to support our healthy eating policy. Although we are very grateful for contributions, it's an optional aspect of pre-school life. For afternoon & forest school sessions, the children eat their own snack. We are a NUT-FREE & SEED-FREE pre-school.



Items to name and bring in

Our enrolment fee covers the cost of a St. Mary's Pre-School bag which should be packed with at least one change of clothes & shoes (plus nappy/pull-ups, wipes if appropriate – NB no nappy sacks!) It is important that every item (including the bag!) is clearly named. In winter, children will need a coat, hat and, if it is very cold, mittens or gloves. A pair of wellies are kept in pre-school so that we can play outside every day. All of these items do need to be clearly named. You are welcome to use our pre-school pens for this! When children stay for lunch, their lunchboxes and drinks containers should also be named clearly.

We keep spare clothes at pre-school for emergencies and we ask parents and carers to wash and return these if used. We strongly recommend bringing children to pre-school in our uniform or at least simple, easy to manage clothes that don't matter, so that they are free to play without worrying about getting dirty, and to foster independence.

Beautiful pictures ... and so much more

Many parents and carers feel some anxiety about what their child actually does at pre-school and we fully understand that having something to take home as “proof” of learning or opportunity can be very reassuring. While on many occasions your child will bring home a baking creation, drawing, painting or model, they will have been learning and developing in many different and valuable ways each time they attend pre-school – even if this learning is not “visible”. For instance sharing, taking turns, being kind to others and developing listening skills.

We encourage children to participate in craft activities but also respect those who prefer to observe or who simply don't like getting messy! Please do not worry if your child does not appear to have “done” anything: he or she will certainly have been given the opportunity. Although lots of fun, art and craft is only one element of what your child may do at pre-school.

We complete a notice board at the end of each session to tell you what we have been doing. We also record observations on the Tapestry online learning journal system which we use to record their progress throughout their time with us. It's great to know about the things the children have been doing when they are not at pre-school and so we ask you to record activities on the Tapestry system too. The children love to look through their journals and it encourages them to talk about their learning



The wider life of the pre-school

We play an active role within the community, taking part in events such as the annual Flower Festival at St. Mary's Church; inviting parents, carers and other family members to our regular Pre-School Worship; and visiting the Age Concern Centre to entertain them with our Nativity Play.

New families can come and meet us at the Open Day we hold in the summer. Coffee mornings are held on Wednesdays in St. Mary's Church from 8.30-9.30am and many parents go there after dropping off their children at pre-school or school. There is an active parent social committee which organises events and coffee mornings and does a fantastic job in supporting the pre-school and offering a warm welcome to new parents.



Our staff

We are exceptionally fortunate to have a dedicated, highly-qualified and experienced staff, some of whom have been with us for many years, bringing a sense of stability which is crucial for the wellbeing of young children. We support our staff through further study, training and the development of individual areas of professional interest.

We welcome students on placements on a regular basis as we want to share our expertise and provide support to the pre-school staff of the future; all students are carefully supervised in accordance with best practice.



Working with you

Your child will be allocated a Key Person who takes a special interest in his or her development. All staff make observations on all children which help us to understand each child's learning style and to see how we can best help them develop. We share a summary of progress and next steps with you via the Tapestry system and during parent consultation evenings but you are welcome to discuss your child's progress with us at any time. In the fullness of time, the journal will accompany your child to school where the Reception Class teacher (who will also be following the Early Years Foundation Stage) continues them.

We encourage parents and carers to share with their Key Person any information or concerns which may affect their child's wellbeing or behaviour at pre-school – anything from a major event such as moving house to a temporary hiccup such as a poor night's sleep or a mislaid teddy!

You can make an appointment to see your key person or a manager if there is not the opportunity at drop off or pick up. You can also send an e-mail or our parents' book to pass on information. We will send you information via email including a newsletter every half-term. We will obviously be in touch if there is any information which particularly concerns your child.

Parents are very welcome as volunteers within the pre-school once your child has settled. The children are very proud when their parents come in! If you have a skill or occupation you could share with us or if you can tell us about any experiences of another country or culture we would be very grateful.



Our policies

Like all schools and nurseries, we have a set of written policies covering topics such as equal opportunities and health and safety. Copies of these are kept in pre-school and can also be viewed on our website. You are very welcome to borrow our copies held for parents – and we welcome feedback.

As a team, we are committed to the highest standards of practice. We know that, on occasion, this can mean accepting criticism and we aim to manage any complaints in a positive and professional manner. Most issues can be resolved in an informal manner by a chat with your child's Key Person or the Pre-School Manager. But we do, of course, have a formal complaints procedure. If you should ever need to make a formal complaint, our staff will explain the process to you. In order to meet our professional obligations, we also display details of how parents can contact Ofsted with any serious concerns which they feel they cannot discuss with pre-school staff or management team.



What does a session cost?

It currently costs £7.50 per hour for children under three years old and £7 per hour session when your child turns three. Lunch club for children over three costs £7 per session. Our fees are reviewed in September each year. We are a non-profit making organisation. Through the government's Early Years Funding Scheme, children aged three and four years old are eligible for up to 15 hours of free pre-school education for up to 38 weeks of the year. There are also other possibilities for funding and tax free childcare details of which can be found on www.childcarechoices.gov.uk. Funding can be applied to any sessions except the lunch club sessions. We will automatically apply for this funding on your behalf from the term after your child's third birthday. A weekly Forest School session can be taken as part of your Free entitlement funding if your child is attending school the following year. Please note however that we may not be able to offer all of the hours for which your child is entitled to funding and that our pre-school is only open for 37 weeks each year. For further details on funding please see <https://www.westsussex.gov.uk/education-children-and-families/childcare-and-earlyeducation/> For further details about how we allocate sessions please see our admissions policy which is available on our website - www.stmaryspreschoolhorsham.co.uk.

Fees for each term are due for payment by the first Friday of the term. We do offer the option to pay in instalments if this is helpful and we accept payment in cash, by cheque or through workplace childcare vouchers.

If at any time you have difficulty paying, do please contact us. We would never wish a child to be unable to attend our pre-school due to financial considerations and we have a special fund which may be accessed for these circumstances. Naturally, we treat all such enquiries in complete confidence.

We require six weeks notice before a child is withdrawn from pre-school. If less notice is given, fees for the notice period will still be charged.



How do I reserve a place for my child?

If you would like your child to come to St. Mary's Pre-School, you will need to fill in an application form – you'll find one at the back of this prospectus, and you can also download forms from our website: www.stmaryspreschoolhorsham.co.uk. We recommend that you do this well in advance as we usually have a waiting list. Children can attend our pre-school from age two-and-a-quarter (in the academic year that they are three) but readiness for pre-school depends very much on the individual child. Many parents opt for two sessions initially and then build on this as their child becomes able to manage more.

Your application form should be returned, together with our £20 registration fee *, to St Mary's Pre-School, c/o The Parish Office, Causeway, Horsham RH12 1HE.

We allocate places about six months before the academic year your child is due to start at pre-school, on a first come first served basis. If you accept our offer of a place, we ask for a £85 enrolment fee * which is non-refundable. At this time, we will give you the opportunity to express your preference for the days you would like your child to attend.



* Please note, in exceptional cases these fees are refundable.

Come and visit us!

If you would like to come and visit to get a sense of the atmosphere and meet the staff, you will be warmly welcomed. We try to arrange visits for mid-morning, to avoid the busiest “coming and going” times. You are welcome to bring your child along with you and we suggest about an hour is a good length for a visit.

Please book in advance so that we can arrange for extra cover to give us time to show you around and answer your questions.

You can get in touch with us by calling us during pre-school hours on 07510 303043.

