

Saint
John's

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Kindergarten





College



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Childhood is full of exciting new experiences which we, as parents and teachers, relive through the eyes and laughter of our children. However, sometimes we have to begin to let go of our children and encourage them through our assurance to make the first steps towards independence. Starting school is one of the first significant milestones in the 'letting go' process and it is invariably harder for parents than children!

This handbook does not pretend to tell you everything about the life of a child in the Kindergarten. We hope that it will help you to feel that we wish to share with you the many joys and to support you and your child through the occasional pains of life at school.

At the heart of our approach at St John's is the desire to meet the individual needs of each child and provide a positive, nurturing environment so that they will grow into contented, confident individuals who discover and become their best selves in whatever field that might be. Children will only learn if they are happy and have a sense of self-worth and it is to these qualities that we pay the greatest attention in the Kindergarten and beyond. We do this not least because we believe that such an approach guarantees the best learning but also because we believe that a child's social and emotional development is of paramount importance.



Communication

Even if children have had significant experience of pre-school education, the transition from home to school is a demanding one, for parent and child. To make this change as smooth and as comfortable as possible, we very much encourage communication between home and school. This begins at the very start of the term, where we ask all parents to arrange a meeting with their child's Form Teacher which gives us a chance to discuss all joys or worries which may have arisen over the summer holiday period, or are naturally present when little ones start school. An invitation to book these will be sent out in advance.

Initially, we encourage parents to stay with their children for a little while at the beginning of each day if this is going to help the children to settle happily. You should certainly expect to see your child's teacher at the beginning and end of each school day to exchange a quick few words to ensure that all has been well. You might, of course, wish to discuss some matters at greater length or in private, in which case you may either make an appointment with the teacher at a mutually convenient time or contact the Byron House Office to book into the teacher's 'surgery' time. We are always happy to share your child's progress with you.

If we feel there is a need to discuss any aspect of your child's development or happiness, you can be sure that we will contact you. Conversely, it is important that you should feel able to let us know if there is a situation at home that is likely to cause anxiety for

your child. Illness in the family, the death of a pet or sleepless nights, for example, will all be very important in your child's world at home and at school and it is very helpful to share any such worries and, of course, any joys. We would also like to know immediately if you feel that there is any unhappiness associated with school. In an emergency school can be contacted on 01223 353817 during the school day.

We provide reports or parent evenings at three points in the school year and we observe the simple rule that these must not contain any unpleasant surprises. With the right mixture of formal and informal contact, we hope to ensure that your child's move into the extended family of the school will be as happy as possible.

“The teachers are brilliant at keeping parents informed; they are never too busy to chat to us and the relaxed start to the day with the emotions board and encouragement to accompany your child into the classroom and get them settled means there is plenty of time at the start of the day to let the staff know anything that has cropped up the day before or overnight.”

Early Years Foundation Stage

The Kindergarten year is your child's first step on their learning journey at St John's and it is also their final year of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). Although St John's is exempt from the national EYFS framework we currently continue to follow this curriculum. You will therefore find references to this within our documentation. For example, your child's Form Teacher may also be referred to as their "key person" (and their teaching assistant as their "deputy key person"). The role of the key person is to help ensure that every child's care is tailored to meet their individual needs, to help the child become familiar with the setting, offer a settled relationship for the child and build a relationship with their parents.

At the end of the year, as part of our thorough reporting process, we share your child's progress within the seven areas of learning across the EYFS assessment scales. The KG curriculum is divided into the three prime areas and then four specific areas, which build on these. The prime areas are: Personal, Social and Emotional Development; Physical Development; Communication and Language. The specific areas are: Literacy; Mathematics; Understanding the World; Expressive Arts and Design. The areas overlap considerably and topics are used

to help the children make sense of their learning and to allow them to make links between new ideas and what they already know. Each area of learning is implemented through planned, purposeful play and through a mix of adult-led and child-initiated activity.

At St John's the curriculum is currently planned around the 'Development Matters' (or learning objectives) in the Early Years Framework and aims for all children to achieve or exceed the 'Early Learning Goals' by the end of Kindergarten. Should you wish to see any of the background information which supports this, then you are welcome to do so at any time, however, you will also automatically receive updates or observations about your child's progress each half term. We welcome your feedback at these times too!

“The greatest importance is put on happiness at St John's and it is such a caring and happy place to be. The Kindergarten children barely notice they are learning as they are having so much fun! So much thought is put into making learning interesting and appealing. ”



Emotions for Learning

Emotions for Learning (E4L) is a curriculum and an approach to learning and relating at school that has been developed uniquely at St John's. We have created an entire social and emotional curriculum for our youngest children based on research and evidence about how children's minds and brains develop. It is designed to encourage the children to express their opinions and feelings and give them the knowledge, skills and understanding they will need to be able to think creatively and problem solve effectively in all areas of their lives.

The E4L 'way of being' encompasses everything that we believe about child development, well-being, the importance of teacher-child relationships and effective ways of learning. E4L is not simply a curriculum, it is a part of how we are at St John's.

“ I like stiling on the ladybird cushions because you can rest and get ready to think. ”





“ As part of E4L we learn to do action stories which is a bit like a massage. I like action stories because I learn how to be more gentle with my friends. ”

“ I like following our ‘steps to solving problems’ because it works and I like making people feel happy. ”

A confident start

We do not assume that children will have received any formal teaching before arriving at St John's. Given that they will have had a variety of pre-school experiences and that an age difference of even a few months can be very significant in the early years, we differentiate the learning according to your child's stage of development and individual needs and track the children's progress throughout the year.

All in all, you need not feel that any special preparation or any particular skills are needed or that there is any standard formula for preparing your child for school. Love, encouragement and time to talk with and listen to your child are the most valuable pre-requisites to a happy time in Kindergarten and the most important thing is that you, and your child, feel confident in joining St John's.

There are several simple ways in which a certain degree of independence gives a child more confidence for the start of school.

Many children find dressing and undressing themselves particularly difficult and, as parents, it is often easier to take charge of this task. However, your child will feel more confident having practised dressing in school uniform or having learned to fasten buttons and shoes. The uniform can help children to talk about the excitement that lies ahead and to feel a sense of belonging to their new community by literally and emotionally 'trying on' the clothes of their future.

Using the lavatory in a strange new building can be quite a daunting task for a little one. To help avoid any unhappiness, it is important for the children to feel able to clean themselves after using the lavatory and to wash their hands.





In our often noisy and busy world, it can be difficult for children to filter out extraneous background noise and learn how to listen to one person. At the same time, our children are often sheltered by us from the uncertainty of having to deal with large groups of friends at one time. As you will guess, learning to listen, to share things and be prepared to 'take turns' are important social skills in themselves and any practice you can give will help your child to settle contentedly into school life.

On a similar theme, it is always helpful to a child to find a familiar face or two on the first day at school. We are happy to provide parents with the addresses of all those who will be new to the Kindergarten and we hope that this will help you to set in motion some new friendships, many of which will last throughout the children's time at school and even beyond.

There are a number of excellent books available that deal with 'starting school'; it would be beneficial to share these books with your child so that they can raise any questions or exciting expectations. If you would like suggestions of some titles please do get in touch with us.

“The staff are extremely experienced in helping the children to settle in. They are very good at giving your child fun activities to do, such that they forget that mummy is leaving!

My daughter rushes into the playground each morning to see her friends, and then rushes into the classroom eager to see what settling in task she has been given. ”



Caring for your child

The Kindergarten is specifically set out with its own home base providing for almost all of the children's needs. The main people in your child's life will be the Form Teacher and their classroom assistant (each Kindergarten class has full time and expert classroom assistance).

These will not, however, be the only adults your child encounters. Specialist teachers will take each class for Music, Drama, PE and French. It may, therefore, take a little while before all the teachers' names are known but we will provide you with a full list of the relevant staff at the beginning of the year.

Daily routines

Before the doors open officially there is an opportunity every morning at 8:20am for you to come into the classroom to chat to the class teachers, let them know anything that might help us to look after your child that day and also have a look at any creations your child may like to share. When the doors open formally at 8.30am your child will be greeted by their Form Teacher and members of the KG team. All children will be encouraged independently to unpack their book bag, snack and reading book, hang up their coat and complete self-registration by placing their photo on our feelings wall. Upon returning to the classroom the children quickly become confident to find the 'mini-me' that guides them to an individually tailored morning challenge which has been planned to support the next steps in their learning.

At 8.45am we tidy up for our morning meeting, which gives us an opportunity to go through our visual timetable and menu choices for the day as a class, and to share compliments with the day's class monitor. After this we will then have a skills-based teacher-led session followed by a mixture of adult-led, adult-guided and child-initiated learning opportunities, as well as any other specialist lessons. Then it is time for lunch with the Form Teachers and playtime outdoors in the forest garden.

We start our afternoons with a 'stilling', and another short teacher-led session before moving into another period of child-led independent learning and adult-guided or led activities. Throughout the day the children have access to all areas of KG including our outdoor area and garden and are encouraged to move freely as they explore their own interests.

The KG team use observations of the children to enhance the environment for play, creating a high level of challenge within their natural play behaviours, and are skilled at knowing when play can be extended through sensitive adult support.

The day ends with a thorough tidy, dough disco (to strengthen developing hand muscles and get us ready for writing) and shared stories and poems before the children are dismissed at 3.15pm.

Each day your child will be encouraged to have their book bag, any reading books and their snack in school with them.

We ask that their snacks are healthy please and that chocolate and crisps are avoided. A small sandwich is an excellent option. Please note that snacks should not contain any nuts, as we are a nut-free school.

No stationery or pencil cases should be brought to school; this will all be provided in their classroom.

At lunchtime, the children sit at a table with their teaching assistants. We help them to develop the important social skills of taking turns and of conversation, and we help them with their table manners in this context. While we are proud of the quality of the food our catering staff provide, children are gently encouraged to enjoy their food and we are careful to avoid any unhappiness in this respect. Many children do find it difficult to wield a knife and fork and your child will feel more confident if he/she can make a good attempt at this.



The Facilities

The Kindergarten children benefit from access to architect-designed facilities including spacious open-plan classrooms, which allow in plenty of light and promote child-led and independent learning, pale wood furniture, bespoke storage at child height and free access to outdoor spaces.

“The facilities are wonderful. Everything has been designed around the children’s needs. The outdoor area is really special. It is lovely for my child to learn in an outdoor environment. ”

Outdoor Learning

The Kindergarten outdoor learning environment includes a landscaped woodland, allotment and a compost area. Each concept has been carefully thought out to maximise the opportunities for enquiry and problem-solving. These spaces flow seamlessly out from the Kindergarten canopied outdoor transition space.

Research published by the RHS shows that as well as helping children lead happier, healthier lives, gardening helps them to acquire the essential skills they need to fulfil their potential in a rapidly-changing world and make a positive contribution as a whole. The children learn about nature, ecology, wildlife, nutrition and the seasons. They discover how to care for and obtain natural materials sustainably, how to propagate, care for and harvest their own produce. The area is also a good tool for learning about cause and effect.

Beyond the raised beds which are home to a range of perennial and annual herbs, as well as the seedlings sown by the Kindergarten and Gardening Club, shrubs have been planted to provide different textures, colours and year round interest. Some shrubs will eventually provide plenty of opportunities for climbing while the annual pruning of others will offer the children weaving and den building materials.

“It is wonderful for the Kindergarten children to have their own separate play area, particularly in the early stages of joining the school.”





Forest Garden

One morning per week throughout the year the Kindergarten children attend forest school on site in the forest garden. We go out in all weathers to learn about our senses and the natural world, building resilience through team games as well as developing fine and gross motor skills through challenges such as building dens and working with tools.

After a whole school Friday assembly we discuss the weather as a class and decide what clothing we need to wear. We then dress in any required waterproofs and thermals and use our phonics and recording skills to make a kit list of the equipment we want to take to the Forest Garden. Upon arriving in the woodland we go to our 'sit spot' for a mindful moment before coming together as a year group for our opening circle. The children use a talking stick to share what they have noticed and then undertake a teacher-led challenge. We use snack time in the forest garden as an opportunity to come together for a storytelling session before moving into an extended period of child-led independent learning in the forest garden.

“ The forest garden is beautiful and encourages imaginative play. ”



After school care

On Wednesday afternoons, when the Kindergarten children normally finish at 12:15pm, we offer after school care until 3:15pm. The children who remain for these entirely optional sessions will be engaged in play and other activities that will not be a part of the formal curriculum. We hope that this will prove of benefit to families in which alternative arrangements would otherwise need to be made for the care of children who could not be at home at such times. Parents may book a place before the beginning of each term.

After 3:15 each day, Kindergarten children may wait in 'Byron House Waiters 3:15-4pm'.

Byron House Waiters 3:15-4pm is open to children in Forms KG to T2. Places are limited and priority is given to those children with older siblings being collected at 4pm. Waiters takes place in the T1 and T2 classrooms or in the KG classrooms and outside area.

Members of the school staff supervise the children. There is a charge for this facility (unless parents are waiting for an older sibling in Form 1 to Form 6) and parents may book a place before the beginning of the new school year or before the beginning of each term.

It is possible to request a place in Byron House Waiters 3:15-4pm on a casual basis if a place is available on the day. Please contact the Byron House Secretary if you wish to do so.

From 4-5:30pm there is an additional extended Waiters option. This again takes place in one of the Pre-Prep classrooms and is supervised by a member of school staff. Snacks are provided and there is an additional hourly charge for this provision.

If you are ever unable to collect your child due to unforeseen circumstances, they would be in excellent care. We ask that you phone school as soon as practicable on 01223 353817 to let us know what time you expect to be able to collect them, and we would also try to reach you on the emergency numbers provided. Your child would join Byron House Waiters 4-5:30pm until you are able to collect them and they would transfer to the care of the Boarding House if they are not collected by 5:30pm.

In the very unlikely event that your child ever went missing at school, our policies and procedures are outlined in our Missing Child Procedure.



Listening, Speaking & Reading

Many of the activities which the children enjoy inside and outside the Kindergarten classroom are similar to childhood experiences at home. In this sense, the best rule is simply for you to continue to enjoy your time as a parent with your child.

It is easy to imagine that the move to more formal schooling requires a similar change to your time with your child at home. In fact, the children often find the school day quite demanding and it is more important that they have the room to relax and enjoy the security of life at home than that you should feel the need for them to be 'learning' in a formal sense.

Having said this, much of the best learning is done through play or through sharing some fun with a parent. Most children love sharing fiction and non-fiction picture books with an adult and, at such times, listening to your child, and encouraging your child to listen to you and others, will benefit language development enormously. Many children love to listen and respond to songs and rhymes and this, too, can be highly beneficial for language development. Often, it will be through a child's own imaginative play, making dens and creating magical worlds, that language will be explored and will grow most fruitfully.

If children have experienced the joy of sharing picture books with a parent, then they will have realised that there is some connection between the spoken word and the symbols on the page. In Kindergarten, we play a variety of matching games, snap and pairs which help the children's visual memory. Some of these games also involve finding rhyming words using objects and pictures.

Once at school, when ready, your child will be encouraged to read a small number of sight vocabulary words and begin to use initial sounds. They will learn to attach a sound to a letter shape. It may be that your child has already reached this stage. It is important that your child uses the sounds of the alphabet letters rather than the names so that he/she is ready to blend sounds to make words.

We find that children can be at very different stages in their reading progress and we are happy to offer advice about the best ways in which you might help them to go forward. The golden rule, however, is that reading activities should not become a chore or even a battle ground if we wish to retain a child's natural enthusiasm for reading.





Counting & Writing

It is possible to encourage an understanding of the concept of number naturally through everyday conversations and this will be more beneficial to your child than simply learning to recognise the symbols for numbers. Many children enjoy counting everyday objects such as the stairs or plates for a meal with an adult. They may also enjoy helping you to sort clothes. Some children are particularly keen on sorting activities and will love sorting objects by colour, size and shape. Linking with imaginative play, some children enjoy playing shop, which provides many opportunities for counting. Many children enjoy cooking with an adult and this activity provides a wealth of opportunities for counting, weighing, estimating and comparing.

Such activities are a regular feature of daily life in the Kindergarten and education at this stage is very much a development of the children's natural instinct for learning through play. It is no coincidence that children invent, through their play, the best opportunities for learning but it is sometimes easy for parents to feel that they should invent learning opportunities rather than looking for the best ways to find learning within the normal life of their child. Again and again, we (and scientific researchers) find that play and learning go hand in hand and that, in this sense, there is nothing more serious than a child at play.

It is important not to coax children into trying to write their letters before they are ready. As Kindergarten teachers we have found that it is more beneficial to pursue activities that develop motor control and hand/eye co-ordination rather than rush to use a conventional pencil which may be too narrow for a child's small hand to control. We encourage activities involving finger-painting, finger rhymes and making jigsaws. Playing with construction toys, painting with thick brushes, cutting and sticking are all excellent ways of encouraging the physical development of the hand movements necessary for a smooth transition to writing.

We are very much aware of the pressure that some parents feel to help their child progress with formal learning but our main concern is with 'readiness for learning'. Too soon can be counter-productive both in terms of the learning itself and in terms of a child's self-esteem. While you can be sure that our children do make excellent progress over the years, the motto is to 'make haste slowly'.

“My daughter is very happy at school and is learning lots. Her favourite thing is writing.”



Exploring

You may well have found that your life with your child has often become a matter of asking the question, 'Why?'. Young children see the world very clearly and are fascinated by tiny details which we may have begun to take for granted. As you will know, such questions provide a wonderful opportunity to share a child's sense of wonder.

During the Kindergarten year the children are encouraged to explore, question and begin to make sense of the world around them. It is possible for many of these activities to run concurrently with home. Many children like to discover how things work and we are all familiar with questions from children that we feel quite incapable of answering! If you can enjoy discovering things together and share your child's curiosity, you will be helping greatly both with the learning itself and, perhaps more importantly, with encouraging a child to feel the pleasure of learning.

Some children love making imaginative models from an assortment of materials from cardboard boxes to cotton reels. Others love to discover more about the natural world through looking at pictures, going for walks, helping in the garden or caring for pets. It is a simple truth that we do not need to give children a sense of wonder but rather seek to preserve and foster the natural curiosity that they carry with them.

“Independent learning is the best because we get to choose anything we want. I like making robots!”



Physical development

From the beginning, children use their wonderful store of energy to develop physically and this area of learning plays an important part at school as well as at home. The development of good 'gross motor skills' is a natural one and different children will find themselves at different points on the spectrum in this respect. Often, after a busy day in the classroom, children are very much ready for physical exercise and, again, it is simply a matter of channeling the energy as positively as possible.

There can be little doubt that the tree was primarily invented to help children to develop physically and it is important that, within the bounds of safety, they should feel able to explore their physical abilities and limitations, be it up a tree or on swings, trampolines or whatever. The ball, albeit a human invention, is likewise wonderful, and kicking and catching games are excellent for gross motor co-ordination.

It is intriguing to watch children at play and to see how they manage to develop games that involve running, jumping, moving under and over objects, balancing and climbing and manipulating objects of different sizes: in other words, all the skills we foster within our curriculum.







Expressive arts and design

Creativity is a vital aspect of successful and enjoyable learning. Being creative will help your child to make connections between the areas of learning and to extend his/her understanding. You may like to join your child in their creative world by exploring colour, shape, form and texture, by painting, using thick stubby crayons and chinks, or by making collages and models.

Many children enjoy improvising on makeshift musical instruments or joining in singing songs with you as they explore the world of rhythm and sound. They often love listening or dancing to music.

The more that we can share such activities with our children and the more that they see how much pleasure we ourselves gain from our own creativity, the more they will feel that their natural creativity is important.

Painting, Design Technology, Singing, Music Making and Drama are very much a part of the children's lives throughout their time at school.

The Nativity play, at the end of the Michaelmas Term is always one of the highlights of the school calendar and, along with dressing up days (for Book Week, for example) it is one of those occasions on which the help of parents in providing costumes is always deeply appreciated. It is also one of the occasions, as with our Pre-Prep Sports Day, when many a tear of parental affection and pride is shed.



“I like pretending to be things in Drama and playing sleeping lions.”

Conclusion

We hope very much that, having read this guide, you will feel reassured that all will be well for you and for your child when September comes. Further information is available in the Kindergarten Curriculum and Supervision Policy.

We know that we have omitted many of the details of daily life as a Kindergarten parent but you can be sure that you will be given such details separately. We hope that, rather than overloading you with information, this guide has given you an overview of our approach to children and to their learning. Of all things that will affect a child's happiness and progress at school, the shared aims of home and school and the co-operation between us in meeting such aims will be one of the most significant factors, so it is important that we should understand each other from the outset.

While we hope very much to share with you the joys of your child's growth, we know also that families and children do experience times of difficulty. Indeed, it is unlikely that any child will go through nine years of schooling without experiencing some uncertainty and it is at such times that the bond between home and school needs to be strong. Very often, it is in overcoming difficulty of one sort or another that we and our children grow most and we hope that you will feel absolutely assured that we are as interested in your pains as we are in your joys.

We place great emphasis on the emotions for learning programme which infuses every aspect of the curriculum and the way that teachers relate to the children and the children relate to each other.

We can also assure you that our child-centered approach does work. We try not to rush our children's development and we find that this pays great dividends as they grow through the school. Measured purely by results, our record is outstanding. Measured by the self-esteem, confidence, kindness and fulfillment of our children by the time we ourselves must let them go, the fruits of our care are abundantly evident. While we take much pride in this, we are always aware that, at heart, the strength of our children comes largely from home and our task is simply to build on this with you.

“One of the wonderful thing about St John's is the way the older children are encouraged to help the younger children and form friendships with them. There is such a caring atmosphere in the playground. I often hear about the older children from my Kindergarten child and her older siblings feel a real sense of pride and responsibility about helping the Kindergarten children settle in and take care of them. ”





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