

What to expect in Kindergarten





Welcome and Introduction

"We are delighted to welcome you and your child to Kindergarten at Michael Hall, where we aim to offer a warm and progressive approach to early childhood education within a nurturing environment. This handbook will offer you a picture of your family's journey within our community."

*Rachel Ford-Blanchard
Assistant Principal, Kindergarten Lead, EY DSL and SENCo*

Steiner-Waldorf Early Childhood Education

In the Michael Hall Kindergartens, we foster a sense of belonging. Our education is child centred and adult led. It honours the uniqueness of each child while at the same time working with the needs of the group as a whole. Since a child's primary mode of learning is that of doing, learning is integrated rather than subject-based with an emphasis on process and experience rather than outcome. Children are given the time to grow and learn with plenty of opportunities for uninterrupted play-based exploration.

Children can enter the Kindergarten once they are three years old and move to the Lower School the academic year they turn seven. This later start to formal education allows children to experience the joy of learning without unnecessary

pressure. The most important foundations for future learning are the development of a healthy body, a desire to learn and inner confidence.

In each group there are up to 16 children. Emphasis is placed upon an interactive social experience through which qualities such as co-operation, empathy, independence and initiative can develop. Each Kindergarten group is a 'family' of mixed-aged children, a family which stays together to provide a sense of belonging and caring for one another. Younger children learn from their older peers, who in turn have an opportunity to take responsibility and provide support for the younger ones.



Rhythm and Repetition

Our Kindergarten is based on the principles of rhythm and repetition, imitation and care of the young child's senses.

Working within a strong and regular rhythm promotes a sense of security and self-confidence. Rhythm is reflected in our daily life, giving form and structure so that the children know what to expect. The daily rhythm and its pattern of activities are cradled within the rhythm of the week. For example, painting and baking are repeated on the same day each week. A cyclical pattern is also reflected in the way that themes relate to seasons of the year. With each season comes a regular activity - for example grinding wheat in the Autumn or planting seeds in the Spring. Stories and songs relate to the seasons and the nature table reflects the changing natural environment through the year.

Imitation

Children learn best through their innate capacity to imitate. Since learning gains meaning by its relevance to life, the teacher surrounds the children with purposeful activities that care for the Kindergarten 'home'. Cooking, baking, gardening, cleaning and caring for materials are all meaningful tasks, tasks which are nourishing for children to imitate.



The Importance of the Natural Environment for the Young Child

Children come into life with a sense that the world is good. They live in a dreamy consciousness - quite different from that of adults - within which they feel inwardly connected with all that surrounds them. Peace and time to be in the natural world are essential to experiencing the wonders of life. Children enjoy experiencing sunlight and darkness, sparkly frosts and fires, muddy puddles and flower-filled meadows as they joyfully celebrate the seasons of the year through all that nature brings.

The natural environment provides children with a sense of adventure, expanding their horizons and exposing them to the unplanned and unknown. Through creating their own, often ingenious, physical challenges and risks, children practise discernment and decision-making and, in so doing, learn much about their strengths and limitations.

A young child's need to move is fundamental at this age. Space to run, skip and climb, stretch out and test balance helps children to develop co-ordination.



Creative Play

"There was a child that went forth every day, and the first object he look'd upon, that object he became..."
Walt Whitman

In our Kindergartens we attach great importance to the role of self-directed play in healthy child development. We support the children in their imaginative endeavours through the provision of simple, unformed, natural materials that nurture their senses and maximise imaginative potential. We believe that the free flow of imagination in childhood forms the foundation for free-flowing thinking as an adult.

A Typical Morning

Starting time - 08:10: doors are open from 08:00.

On your arrival, the teachers will greet you and your child in the Kindergarten building or garden; this is a natural opportunity for you to share anything you may need to say about your child. During this part of the morning children have the opportunity to play with their friends and be involved in one of the weekly activities such as baking or painting. There are regular walks throughout the vast school grounds.

Ring time

The children come together with the teacher, who leads a rhythmical sequence of songs, poems, finger games and traditional ring games. The content draws on what is happening outside in nature throughout the changing seasons, such as gathering apples at summer's end and chopping wood for the winter fire. The children copy the teacher's gestures and movements. Ring time is a daily activity.

Eurythmy

Eurythmy is a form of movement developed by Rudolf Steiner. It engages the whole human being, enhancing children's co-ordination and helping them feel more at ease with themselves. Eurythmy is fundamental to the curriculum from Kindergarten through to Class 12. At this age the eurythmy teacher will usually use a fairy tale as a base for the movement.

Break time

At mid-morning the children enjoy a healthy snack around the table together. A reverent mood is created through the lighting of a candle and the group saying a verse together. A sense of respect is felt throughout the meal and reinforced at the end by the group speaking a verse to say "thank you". The children set the table with care and attention to detail and some may have helped to prepare the food. Children are also involved in serving and clearing away the snack. We provide a range of organic wholesome food on the same days each week.



"Children want spaces at all ages.... ample space is almost as much wanted as food and air. To move, run, to find things out by new movement, to feel one's life in every limb, that is the life of early childhood."

Margaret McMillan

Time for Creative Play

This offers an opportunity for children to initiate their own play, free from adult involvement and direction. The children recreate all that they have observed in their day-to-day lives. A whole host of elaborate structures and associated play themes emerge from the hustle and bustle: 'houses', 'shops', 'hospitals', 'veterinary clinics', 'cars', 'trains', 'boats' and 'planes' may be built out of simple items such as logs, shells, stones, conkers, pine cones, veils, tables and chairs. Play is children's 'work' and they take it very seriously!

Craft, Handwork and Seasonal Activities

Alongside creative play there is an opportunity for children to work out of their own initiative at practical and artistic tasks such as sewing, drawing, baking, cooking, painting or woodwork. Handwork and crafts are connected to the seasons: autumn gives us nature's treasures - teasels, leaves, nuts and berries, which give rise to leafy mobiles and woven tapestries, while wools and warm textures nourish the senses through the cold months of winter. Conversely, spring and summer are the time for light airy fabrics, for butterflies and bees.

We aim to bring wholesomeness into all our activities, seeing the whole process through from beginning to end. For example, we may make a harvest loaf with our own ground flour. Apples are collected to be made into preserves and pressed into juice.



Tidy-up Time

Tidy-up time unfolds seamlessly out of the creative play period and is an integral part of the morning. This is a time when the children are absorbed in sorting, cleaning, folding, stacking and making sure everything is in its rightful place before play can begin anew the next day.

Story Time

The morning ends with a fairy tale, folk story or puppet play - each one chosen with the season and its pedagogical significance in mind. In hearing the rich and diverse language of fairy tales, children's vocabulary is enriched.

End of Morning Session at 12:30

After a full and busy morning some of the children are handed back into the care of their parent or carer, often with a brief word passing between teacher and guardian about the child's morning. Other children attend our full day provision and are walked by their teacher or assistant to afternoon club where they enjoy a cooked lunch, rest and play with friends from the different kindergartens.

Festivals and Celebrations

Festivals play a significant role in the life of the Kindergarten and they illuminate the way through the seasonal year. These celebrations are deeply nourishing to the young child: they enrich the innate feelings of reverence and openness to the wonders of the world. The children love preparing for the festivals by decorating the room, baking celebratory treats and learning special songs and verses. They enjoy the anticipation of the event itself as well as the magical memories that they are left with. Our festivals foster a special relationship between the parents and Kindergarten setting, creating a sense of belonging for the young child who is held within a wider embrace of caring adults.





How to Support Your Child in Kindergarten

Daily rhythms

Please be punctual when dropping off and collecting your child. Children who arrive late can find it difficult to settle. The children eagerly await your greeting at the end of the morning.

Regular attendance is important for your child's experience and development. Please also refrain from taking holidays during term times. It is important that children are present at all our festivals, which often fall at the end of term: these festivals are a fundamental part of Kindergarten life and create an experience of belonging and completion both for the parents and the children. Taking children out of Kindergarten is sometimes unavoidable, but if they will not be attending for any reason, you must inform attendance@michaelhall.co.uk and the Assistant Principal rachel.ford-blanchard@michaelhall.co.uk. Children should be kept at home if they are unwell.

Kindergarten clothing

Our morning is a time of work and play, some of which is spent outside. Your child needs a full set of waterproofs and boots.

Hats are worn all year round for warmth or sun protection. In summer, shoulders should be covered and sandals should not have open toes.

Please make sure the indoor slippers have backs.

In accordance with the School's clothing policy, clothing and footwear should be without pictures or logos. Please label your child's belongings.





Support We Can Offer

Parents' Evenings

Each Kindergarten has an evening every term where the parents come together with the teacher and enjoy sharing an aspect of the education. Often there will be a craft or artistic activity, and sometimes a guest speaker.

Parent Morning Talks

Informative talks are hosted once a term by the Early Years Assistant Principal after drop off. Topics include information on developmental stages, creative discipline, supporting your ill child at home, and the meanings behind the festivals.

Class Contacts

Each class throughout the school will have one or two Class Contacts. In the Kindergarten their role is to support the teachers and the parents. They also offer help and encourage parents to get involved in Festival preparation, gardening mornings, Advent Fair fund raising and social gatherings.



The Statutory EYFS and Exemptions

The Statutory Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) Birth – 5 years, applies to all settings including ours. It sets out both learning and development requirements and safeguarding and welfare requirements for children from birth to 31 August following their fifth birthday.

Because there are areas which conflict with the Steiner Waldorf early childhood principles and practice, we have received some 'Exemptions and Modifications' to the EYFS requirements and assessment regulations. These are mostly to do with the introduction and in some cases formal teaching of reading, writing, mathematics and use of IT/media and electronics. There is no exemption from the Safeguarding and Welfare requirements.

Entry into Kindergarten

Admission to Kindergarten is for a minimum of three consecutive morning sessions per week on entry, increasing to five sessions a week when the Kindergarten group's teacher or Assistant Principal advises. Attendance for five sessions a week is mandatory for all students starting the term after their fifth birthday.

Entry into Kindergarten is in the Autumn and Spring terms only. For the Autumn term, the child needs to have turned 3 by 31st July and for the Spring term, needs to have turned 3 by 30th November.

We also offer afternoon provision on Monday through to Thursday from 12:30-15:15.

Register your interest

To register your interest or for any questions please contact our Admissions team: admissions@michaelhall.co.uk or 01342 822275

THE KINDERGARTEN ADMISSIONS PROCESS

INTEREST

Register your interest via the website or by contacting the Admissions Team

VISIT

Join us on one of our Open Days and get a full picture of how life is at Michael Hall

APPLY

Complete the online application form via our website

MEET

We will contact you to arrange an initial meeting with your child's Kindergarten Teacher

OFFER

If your application is successful, we will send you a formal offer of a place and the Early Years Assistant Principal will be in contact.

