



St Mary's CE VC First School
Charminster





Welcome



HEAD'S WELCOME

On behalf of our staff and governors, I would like to welcome you to the St Mary's family.

St Mary's Charminster is a wonderful school, full of happy children who love to learn and dedicated adults who love to teach.

Set in the beautiful village of Charminster, on the edge of the town of Dorchester, we pride ourselves on our nurturing ethos which has every child at the centre of all we do. We have a fantastic team who believe in working in partnership with parents and the community to ensure that all of our children are happy and successful.

We love being part of the St Mary's Church community and we work closely together to ensure that we are living up to our foundation as a Church school and enabling all of our children and adults to flourish.

I am thrilled to have been given this opportunity to lead such a nurturing school and to work alongside this community to empower children to flourish. As the father of two-year-old twin boys and two teenage step children, I understand just how precious these years are for our children's development. As such, I am fully committed to ensuring that we provide the conditions required to enable everybody to become the very best version of themselves.

We are extremely proud of our children and our school and would always welcome the opportunity to show you around.

We look forward to meeting you.

Mick Homer
Headteacher

ABOUT ST MARY'S

Our school, in its present state, was built in the 1950's with additional accommodation added in 1996, 2003, 2006 and 2009 on the site of the old school.

We are a voluntary controlled Church of England school within the Diocese of Salisbury, working closely with St Mary's Church to ensure that we live up to our foundation as a church school.

St Mary's is a Dorset Council maintained school sitting within the Dorchester locality. We work closely with Education Challenge Leads at the local authority to ensure that we are best meeting the needs of our community.

Our Governing Body is the responsible body of our school and ensure that the school's leaders are held to account and are making decisions in the best interest of our community.

The school serves boys and girls from age four to nine across the communities of Charminster, Charlton Down, Stratton, Bradford Peverell, Grimstone and Frampton.

Our school consists of six classrooms, one dedicated music room and a school hall as well as a sensory room, a number of additional learning spaces, a parent support room, a library and administrative areas. Our extensive grounds offer wonderful facilities both for recreation and environmental studies, with wildlife areas including a pond, vegetable garden, agility equipment, wooded Forest Schools area and a large field.



A school built on love

“The strong partnership with St Mary’s Church, through the clergy, nurtures the spiritual journeys of the whole community well.”



ST MARY'S CHURCH

Welcome to the wonderful St Mary's Church of England VC First School; a small, local school at the heart of our rural community, where children are encouraged to grow in confidence, in their abilities and interests both inside and outside the classroom, in friendship, and in faith. Students describe our school as a 'family'. It is, in their words, a 'joyful' and 'creative' place, filled with passionate staff and happy students.

Our church and school share an exceptionally close relationship that is experienced in the daily lives of children, parents, staff, governors and the church. We consider ourselves one Christian community, and we aim to model the unconditional love of God with an openness that embraces and values the differences in background, belief, and life experience that each child and adult within our community brings with them. Throughout their time at St Mary's, every child will be encouraged to practise our school's core Christian Values, to engage with their beliefs, to develop their understanding of different world views and religions, and to nurture their own spiritual and emotional wellbeing.

As the local Rector (vicar), I am also a school governor, and work alongside the staff and governing body to ensure that your child has the best education and experience they can in these formative years. Every year we see children arriving in Reception excited to start their learning adventure, and children leaving Year Four as confident, honest and passionate young people, ready to launch into their middle school careers. We hope that you will enjoy exploring our school through this prospectus and we look forward to welcoming your children into our care as we support them to grow into young learners.

With every blessing

Rev'd Leila Mather

Rector of Charminster, Stinsford and the Chalk Stream Villages

"Pupils are clear that they are safe and happy in school."



SCHOOL LIFE

Class Organisation

Our school is currently transitioning away from mixed-aged classes to a single-aged class model. Historically, we were allowed to admit forty-two children into each year group, but this was recently reduced to thirty. From September 2022 onwards, every class entering our school has/will be set in a single class of thirty children.

Our rationale for moving away from mixed-aged classes is linked to our desire to enable our children to become the very best version of themselves. With heightened curriculum expectations, it has proved challenging to teach children of different ages at the same time. Many areas of the EYFS and National Curriculums are specific to children's year groups and, through careful planning, they build upon children's previously taught knowledge and skills. These must, therefore, be taught sequentially.

Our current class organisation, for the academic year 2023-24, is as follows:

Class Name	Year Group
Willow	30 x Reception pupils
Oak	30 x Year One pupils
Beech	17 x Year Two pupils
Maple	17 x Year Two pupils
Linden	Mix of Year 3 & 4 pupils
Ash	Mix of Year 3 & 4 pupils

From September 2024, we will drop to five classes and our class organisation is likely to be as follows:

Class Name	Year Group
Willow	30 x Reception pupils
Oak	30 x Year One pupils
Beech	30 x Year Two pupils
Linden	34 x Year Three pupils
Ash	30 x Year Four pupils

School Day

Our school opens at 8am for those children booked into Breakfast Club. The children can have toast or cereal and are encouraged to sit together in a social setting, after which they go straight to their relevant classrooms ready for the start of the school day.

Our doors open to all children at 8:30am and we ask all children to be in by 8:45am.

The morning session (8:45am - 12:05pm) consists of Collective Worship, Reading, Writing and Maths lessons. The children also have a playtime and a mid-morning snack.

All children eat lunch in our school hall and hot lunches are served from our supplier, Local Food Links. Many children choose to take up the offer of a free school meal in Reception to Year Two and after this, meals can be booked and paid for by parents. Some children remain eligible for free meals due to their means-tested funding.

The afternoon session (12:55 - 3:00pm) consists of a range of lessons linked to our wider curriculum. These include two PE lessons per week and weekly RE and PSHE lessons. They also have Art, Design & Technology, Geography, History, Music, Science and Computing lessons which are all linked to their ongoing curriculum projects.

Afterschool, we offer a range of extra-curricular activities, including sports, dance and science clubs led by external providers and curriculum clubs which are led by our own staff. We also offer a Stay and Play afterschool club which is bookable and runs from 3:00pm to 5:15pm, daily.





“Children in the early years settle quickly, grow in confidence and make good progress.”

EARLY YEARS

When children first step foot in St Mary's at the tender age of four, they join our Early Years team in our Willow class. Children in the Early Years are at the heart of our school family and benefit from being fully immersed in our school life from day one.

Early Years Curriculum

Personal, social and emotional development, communication and language, and physical development are the prime areas of learning and development in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). These areas are important as they form the foundations upon which all further learning is built.

Literacy, mathematics, understanding the world, and expressive arts and design are the specific areas of learning and development in EYFS. It is through these areas that the prime areas are further applied and strengthened.

Each of these areas is as important as the other and all are interwoven. At the end of the reception year, children are assessed against the Early Learning Goals (ELGs). The purpose of these assessments is to ascertain whether children have achieved the expected level of progress within each area of learning and development.

We interweave all of these areas of learning and development into projects which run throughout the school year. These provide a central focus for our children's play and help to inspire their creativity and thirst for knowledge. Currently, our projects include Me and My Community, Once Upon a Time, Starry Night, Dangerous Dinosaurs and Big Wide World.



Buddy System

All of our children in Early Years are paired up with a Year Four Buddy. They spend time together building trusting relationships and are always seated next to one another during our daily collective worship assemblies. Playing with their buddy at playtime offers support and reassurance at what can otherwise become an overwhelming time for our youngest learners. They also enjoy sharing their learning with each other throughout the year. Our buddies often form such a strong bond that they meet up again years later in middle school!





“Teaching is good, resulting in effective learning, positive behavior and good progress across the school.”

OUR CORE CURRICULUM

Reading

Our children's reading journey starts on day one in Reception, with Phonics. We follow the Little Wandle Letters and Sounds programme which includes daily whole-class phonics lessons followed by small-group reading lessons. We take a 'stage not age' approach to teaching reading, ensuring that all children learn the skills and knowledge they need to progress onto the next step of their individual reading journey.

Once children complete our phonics programme and are sufficiently fluent readers, they move on to whole-class guided reading. Through these lessons, they explore quality texts and the associated vocabulary. They also develop their ability to infer, predict, explain, recall and summarise, all with the goal of enabling them to better engage with a wide range of texts.



Writing

In Reception, children develop their mark making skills before progressing onto giving meaning to their marks. As they learn new sounds through their Phonics, children practise letter formation before combining letters to make words and then simple sentences.

As our children progress along their writing journeys, they develop a range of skills in the areas of grammar, punctuation and spelling. They explore a range of model texts and learn to write for a variety of purposes and audiences.

Writing is promoted throughout all areas of our curriculum. Our overall aim is for children to be able to use writing as a tool for recording and communicating whilst also ensuring that writing is an enjoyable stage of their creative process.



Maths

Throughout St Mary's, we follow the Power Maths White Rose programme. In Reception this combines ten-minute short burst teaching with plenty of practice through both guided and independent play. The children become familiar with a range of models and methods which they continue to use for years to come.

As our children progress through school, their maths lessons follow a unique learning sequence, designed to empower them to understand core concepts whilst growing in confidence. They spend time recalling previously taught knowledge before exploring new content through discovery tasks with teachers and peers. Once they are ready, children then apply their newly acquired skills and knowledge to complete a range of practice activities and to solve problems.





*“The curriculum is designed to be exciting and engaging.
It promotes pupils’ spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well.”*

OUR WIDER CURRICULUM

For most of our curriculum subjects, we use the Cornerstones Curriculum to guide rich and meaningful learning experiences that enable our children to develop a deep understanding of the world around them and to make connections between different areas of knowledge. The Cornerstones Curriculum is a broad and balanced, knowledge-rich curriculum. Its content is delivered through a range of subject-specific projects, which last either a full or half term. Subject-specific projects cover Art & Design, Design & Technology, Computing, Geography, History and Science.

Art & Design

Our Art and Design curriculum enables children to produce creative work; exploring their ideas and recording their experiences. Over time, they become proficient in drawing, painting, sculpture and other art, craft and design techniques. They evaluate and analyse creative works using the language of art, craft and design whilst learning about great artists, craft makers and designers.

Design & Technology

Our Design & Technology curriculum develops children's creative, technical and practical expertise needed for them to perform everyday tasks confidently and to participate successfully in an increasingly technological world. They design and make high-quality products for a range of users, critiquing, evaluating and testing their ideas and the work of others. Children also develop their understanding of the principles of nutrition and they learn how to prepare food.

Computing

Our Computing curriculum teaches children to understand and apply the principles of computer science. They analyse problems and have practical experience of writing computer programs in order to solve such problems. We also ensure that children are responsible users of information and communication technology, particularly when using the internet.

Geography

Through our Geography curriculum, children develop their contextual knowledge of globally significant places, including their physical and human characteristics. They explore processes that give rise to key physical and human geographical features of the world and learn how these are interdependent and bring about change over time. Children also develop their competency in a range of geographical skills, including gathering data through fieldwork and interpreting sources of geographical information.



History

Our History curriculum enables children to know and understand the history of these islands as a coherent, chronological narrative, whilst also building their knowledge of wider-world history. Children develop a historically grounded understanding of abstract terms and concepts, using them to make connections, draw contrasts, analyse trends and ask historically-valid questions. Through their projects, children understand the methods of historical enquiry and discern how and why contrasting interpretations of the past have been constructed.

Science

Through our extensive Science curriculum, children develop their scientific knowledge and conceptual understanding through the specific disciplines of biology, chemistry and physics. They build their understanding of the nature, processes and methods of science through different types of science enquiries that help them answer scientific questions about the world around them. Through their science projects, we ensure that children are equipped with the scientific knowledge required to understand the uses and implications of science, today and for the future.

PE AND SPORT

Through our Physical Education curriculum, we enable children to develop their competence to excel in a broad range of physical activities. We ensure that they have opportunities to remain physically active for sustained periods of time and educate all children to lead healthy, active lives. Throughout the year, we encourage all children to engage in competitive sports and activities, supporting them to do so with resilience, in a respectful manner.

Each year, schools across the country are provided with a PE and Sport Premium fund which is designed to help improve the quality of PE and sport activities on offer. We carefully consider how best to spend this money, ensuring that its impact offers additional and sustainable improvements to PE across our school. One of our major investments is in the provision of high-quality, specialist PE coaching for our children. Each week, we are joined by a multi-sports coach and a dance coach who both work alongside our class teachers to deliver our curriculum PE lessons. This ensures that our children are receiving top quality lessons whilst also providing a level of support and development for our class teachers.

As well as our curriculum offer, we also have a number of active afterschool clubs which children can attend, if they wish. Currently we have two dance clubs and two multi-sports clubs which are offered to a range of year groups on a weekly basis.





MUSIC AT ST MARY'S

For many years, music has been the heartbeat of our school and we are passionate about continuing this focus for years to come. Everyday, music can be heard ringing through our corridors and we love nothing more than joining together on a Wednesday morning to sing our hearts out in our weekly Songs and Praise Collective Worship.

Ofsted recognised Music as a strength of our school:

“Music is a strong aspect of the school’s provision. The wide range of opportunities to perform in front of an audience has a positive impact on raising pupils’ aspirations and broadening their horizons.”

Our Music curriculum enables children to perform, listen to, review and evaluate music across a range of historical periods, genres, styles and traditions, including the works of the great composers and musicians. Children learn to sing and to use their voices, to create and compose music on their own and with others. They also have the opportunity to learn a musical instrument and use technology appropriately for musical purposes. Through the offer of private peripatetic music lessons, children are given the opportunity to progress to the next level of musical excellence and have regular opportunities to perform in school and at external venues.



PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

As well as teaching curriculum subjects, we are also conscious that our role as educators stretches far beyond the academics.

Through our nurturing culture and our vision of enabling children to be the best that they can be, we place a heavy focus on the personal development of our children.

Throughout their time at St Mary's, many of our children choose to take on extra responsibilities which provide them with opportunities to learn new skills and to develop areas of their character. These roles include: School Councilors, ECO Warriors, Litter Buds, Playground Leaders and School Ambassadors.

Ofsted and SIAMS have both recognised our school's commitment to personal development:

"The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good."

"Pupils enjoy their roles of responsibility, including those of the Year 4 ambassadors, who play an active part in the life of their school."

We strongly believe that when children are given the space and freedom to express themselves and be who they want to be, that is when they truly flourish.

Here at St Mary's, we strive to create leaders of tomorrow who are not afraid to think and take risks and do so with the knowledge that supportive adults are championing them at all times. Every child deserves a champion - an adult who will never give up on them and insists that they become the best that they can possibly be.





“Teaching assistants work in close partnership with teachers to provide carefully tailored support for pupils with SEND. They help pupils to manage their feelings and build their self-esteem well.”

INCLUSION AT ST MARY'S

Here at St Mary's, we appreciate that some children find learning more challenging than others and may need extra support to achieve their full potential. Often, children may have difficulties with:

- expressing themselves
- interacting with others
- reading, writing and maths
- engaging with lessons
- controlling their emotions
- sensory or physical mobility

These difficulties can become barriers to learning and, therefore, our school works closely with parents to ensure that we seek and implement the right level of support for all children. Some children need more support than others and this may be in the form of SEN Support or, in more complex cases, an Education, Health and Care Plan.

All children who need any form of additional support to access the curriculum receive an individual 'Pupil Passport' which charts the child's journey towards their individual targets. These are shared and updated at least termly and we are sure to consider both the child's and parents' views when creating these.

Our additional work with children, towards their targets, may include additional Reading, Writing or Maths teaching, Emotional Literacy Support, Forest Schools, Lego Therapy or the provision of additional support in classes.

Miss Thornicroft is our SENDCo here at St Mary's and she is also a member of our senior leadership team. Miss Thornicroft supports staff and parents to ensure that their children are receiving the best possible care and that our curriculum remains fully inclusive to all of our children, no matter their level of need.

“Pastoral care in this friendly, family school meets the academic and spiritual needs of pupils and adults well, enabling all to flourish.”





FAMILY SUPPORT

My name is Karen Bennett and I am Mum to a girl who attends St Osmund's Middle School and a boy who is in Year Three here at St Mary's. I have lived in Charminster for twenty-four years and am passionate about the local communities which I support through this role.

As St Mary's Family Support Advisor, I have the children at the heart of everything I do to ensure they realise and aspire to achieve their full potential. Through fostering positive relationships between families and school, we can work together to help all children enjoy and thrive at school.

I offer a range of support to our families, from relationship difficulties between parent and child to signposting families to supporting agencies, I really am here to help in any way I can. Through the strengthening of home-school relationships, we can all work closer for the good of our children. As the Nigerian proverb says:

"It takes a whole village to raise a child."

I currently work in this role three days per week and am contactable initially via the school office. I also work in school on other days in the role of a Teaching Assistant.

I look forward to working with you and your child to ensure that their time at St Mary's is as successful as possible.

Karen Bennett

Karen Bennett
Family Support Advisor

