



St Mary's
Colchester



PROSPECTUS

Welcome

I hope that as you take a look through our prospectus you'll begin to get a real feel for the unique character of our school.

You'll find plenty of information here but often people find by visiting us they get the best insight into all we have to offer. We would like to invite you to one of our upcoming Open Days. Alternatively, we can arrange a private tour at a time that's convenient to you. If you have any questions or would like to arrange a visit, please don't hesitate to contact our Registrar, Mrs Justine Tierney, who will be happy to help.

St Mary's is an independent school in Colchester, Essex for girls age 3-16 and boys age 3-4. We are proud to have charitable status, meaning all fees are reinvested into the school. We are also truly independent, with no owners or shareholders, and are overseen by a committed governing body who help ensure we provide a high quality education and a happy learning environment.

MRS NICOLA GRIFFITHS
Principal



St Mary's ethos

At St Mary's we help every student develop the confidence to embrace life's challenges.

Learning for a lifetime

At St Mary's we are totally committed to providing your child with an education which fuels a love of learning through excellent teaching and other learning experiences.

Academic focus

St Mary's is undeniably an academic school – our pupils' SATs and GCSE results are among the best in the county. Our school is not academically selective on entry; whatever our pupils' starting point when they join us, our committed teaching team will bring out the potential we know is hidden inside each and every student. In our small school we are able to do this by tailoring the education to suit the needs of each individual. We also give pupils the encouragement and support they need to aim high. St Mary's culture is such that pupils understand that if they work hard they can achieve their very best.

Brilliantly balanced education

Success in life is not just about exam results. Our rich curriculum presents opportunities for our pupils to discover their interests and passions that will bring them great joy throughout their lives – music, drama, art, sport, community, charity, challenge and adventure of all kinds are available for pupils from the youngest age.

Character and confidence

For young people to thrive, learn and achieve, they must feel content, relaxed and secure. At St Mary's, each individual is known and understood and there is a culture in the school community of caring for each other, celebrating successes and working through difficulties. In this environment our young people develop the strength of character and the self-confidence they need to make the most in their life that lies ahead.

'At St Mary's we provide a focused academic education with a wealth of opportunities to stretch each individual intellectually, creatively and physically.'

- Mrs Nicola Griffiths, Principal



‘My daughter grows in confidence every day she attends Kindergarten. She already loves school.’

- Mother of St Mary's Kindergarten pupil



Kindergarten

At St Mary's Kindergarten, we introduce your daughter or son to learning and make sure they have a solid preparation – academically and socially – ready to make the most of all the opportunities school life brings. Children can start at St Mary's Kindergarten in the term they turn 3.

Experts in Early Years

Our specialist Early Years practitioners are experienced and enthusiastic about helping young children to take their first steps in education, encouraging them to be curious, interested and fascinated by life and the world around them.

The perfect place to learn

As well as their own beautiful, purpose-built facility, with its enclosed stunning new multi-sensory outdoor play area, Kindergarten girls and boys also make full use of all the facilities at the Lower School. They love choosing books from the school library and learning drama and dance in the mirrored dance studio. The children also enjoy finding out about the natural environment in the outdoor classroom and Forest School area, as well as participating in outdoor activities on the playing fields or in the school hall. In this way, they begin to develop their confidence by exploring their surroundings.

Working with parents

We believe that a successful education rests upon strong partnerships between home and school. Parents are encouraged to talk to us about their children's progress at any time and there are lots of opportunities for families to come into the Kindergarten to see what we do.

Preparation for school

As part of St Mary's Early Years Foundation Stage, the Kindergarten staff work closely with the Preparatory Class teacher, and this familiarity makes for a seamless transition to school.

Get in touch

You are most welcome to make an appointment to meet with Mrs Justine Tierney, our Registrar, and Miss Suzy Violet, Kindergarten Manager, to discuss how your child might benefit from beginning his or her school journey at St Mary's Kindergarten. Our Kindergarten is very popular and places can fill up over a year in advance, so please get in touch with our Registrar promptly if you are interested.

'St Mary's Kindergarten gives children a head start... they are settled, more independent and ready to learn when they make the move to school.'

- Mrs Emma Stanhope,
Head of St Mary's Lower School

Kindergarten

In our caring and well-disciplined environment, a balanced and dynamic curriculum is offered where each child is encouraged to attain the high standard of which she or he is capable.

Admissions for Kindergarten

Before joining the Kindergarten you and your child are welcome to visit us to become familiar with our environment and staff. This is also an ideal opportunity to discuss your child's learning experiences so far with our experienced Early Years Practitioners. This helps us to make sure that, together, we are meeting your child's needs and can continue to do so throughout their own time with us in Kindergarten.

First days

When your child joins the Kindergarten, we work with you to ensure that they quickly feel at home. The member of staff your child feels most comfortable with will be named as their 'key person' and will monitor their progress and wellbeing at all times. If you have any questions about your child's development at the Kindergarten, the 'key person' is your first point of contact.

Kindergarten uniform

St Mary's Kindergarten pupils wear a practical uniform. Learning to put on a uniform is good preparation for school. Uniform is available from the St Mary's School Shop and can be ordered using the online school shop, which is accessed from the school website or collected in person from the shop at the Senior School (please make an appointment via the Senior School Office). On joining the school, children and their parents often arrange for a full uniform fitting at the shop.

Girls wear the St Mary's summer dress from May half-term to October half-term, when they change to the pinafore with a yellow shirt and blue pullover for the winter months. Boys wear blue school uniform shorts or trousers with the St Mary's polo shirt and blue pullover.





Developing confidence

Kindergarten

Each child's 'key person' makes sure they are progressing at the expected rate and is happy, content and benefiting from all the opportunities to learn and develop at the Kindergarten.

Daily routine

The Kindergarten Core Day starts at 8.30am and finishes at 3.30pm. There are additional sessions which can be added on before or after the 'Core Day' which are helpful for busy families.

Morning activities

The children arrive and start the day in a group together, either with a story or a 'show and tell' session. The rest of the day is made up of a variety of activities, mixing academic and more practical tasks to engage the children's interest and attention. At St Mary's Kindergarten, girls and boys constantly move forward in their learning. Programmes are put in place by our Early Years practitioners so each and every child can develop into a confident and happy individual.

Playtimes

There are regular opportunities for Kindergarten children to run, climb and play in the stunning new multi-sensory outdoor area throughout the Kindergarten day. The new play area provides the children freedom to be adventurous and inquisitive, helping them develop social skills and build self-esteem.

Lunchtimes

The children have a mid-morning snack of milk or water and fruit and vegetables, which they help prepare themselves. Every day, Kindergarten children eat a hot, nutritious and tasty school lunch, which is prepared by the school's own catering team. A weekly menu is available on the website and is displayed at the entrance to the Kindergarten (any dietary requirements are catered for). Children sit at the lunch table with the practitioners to encourage good manners and develop social skills. An afternoon snack is also provided.

Enrichment activities

After lunch, the children have a quiet rest time, with a chance to sleep if needed. The Kindergarten offers lively activities, including Forest School, ballet, cooking, French, music and PE, which take place throughout the week. The 'Core Day' finishes with a group session.

Wraparound care

Children may join us from 7.30am for a session including breakfast before the 'Core Day', and may stay afterwards until 4.30pm or 6pm. Tea is provided for those staying until 6pm.



St Mary's motto,
'Scientia et Veritas',
translates from the Latin as
'Knowledge and Truth'

—
This underpins St Mary's desire to help
pupils to derive pleasure from learning.



Lower School

St Mary's Lower School is set in a period house surrounded by nine acres of beautiful grounds. Although non-selective, this is an academic school which also offers a huge range of creative and lively activities. This forms our 'brilliantly balanced' education.

An amazing journey

During their time at St Mary's Lower School, children make enormous strides in their education. Before beginning in the Preparatory (Reception) Class, they are invited for a series of induction sessions in the classroom with class teachers which help to familiarise them with their new surroundings and builds their confidence ready for the first day at school. Parents have the opportunity to discuss their child's future learning journey with teachers and also enjoy meeting other parents at these sessions.

Academic development

In Early Years we follow the 'Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage' document, published by the Department for Education, including the Seven Areas of Learning and Development - Personal, Social and Emotional Development, Physical Development, Communication and Language, Literacy, Mathematics, Understanding the World and Expressive Arts and Design. From Year 1, pupils develop the foundations in English and Maths and begin to explore Science, Technology and the Creative Arts. French is taught from the Preparatory Class.

A 'brilliantly balanced' curriculum

There is a real focus on academic achievement at St Mary's, but at the same time the balanced and varied curriculum is designed to stimulate a curiosity for learning and develop well rounded individuals. Pupils become independent learners, keen to ask questions and to find the answers themselves, expanding their learning all the time. Their education is enriched through creative subjects taught by specialist teachers, as well as many opportunities to take part in a range of sports.

Outdoor education

Forest School sessions in the school's own outdoor classroom area develop physical confidence, team-building skills and a sense of adventure. These sessions are enormously popular with children; they enhance the children's wellbeing and offer opportunities for reflection.

'St Mary's is a non-selective school with a real focus on academic teaching tailored to each individual. Children make exceptional progress in their learning.'

- Mrs Emma Stanhope, Head of St Mary's Lower School



Lower School

St Mary's Lower School is a member of the prestigious Independent Association of Preparatory Schools, which comprises the world's top schools and offers opportunities to share educational excellence.

The Arts

Pupils' horizons are broadened through creativity.

In weekly music lessons, pupils sing, play percussion instruments and learn musical notation, as well as appreciating different musical styles. Pupils begin to play the recorder in Year 2 and a variety of individual music lessons in instruments such as flute, clarinet, saxophone, violin, guitar, drums and piano are on offer.

Through drama our pupils develop their confidence and imaginations. Every infant has a role in the Christmas Nativity and the juniors take part in a production during the school year. In the spring term, infants have the opportunity to take a LAMDA group levelled exam, in which the girls achieve outstanding results. Pupils also enjoy lessons in our superb studio.

Art is taught as a discrete subject and in our newly refurbished art room. Pupils tackle creative projects, from sculpture to textiles.

Sport

Physical Education is lively and fun at St Mary's. Our team sports are netball, cross country and athletics. We take part enthusiastically in local competitions and tournaments, with great success. Pupils enjoy lessons in swimming, gymnastics, and orienteering. Each year group also enjoys a term of Forest School activities in our fabulous forest area.

A trained dance professional takes ballet lessons in school for pupils in Kindergarten and Prep. Lessons are also available in our studio after school.

Fostering team spirit



Lower School

Monitoring and assessment

Pupils' learning is monitored continually to ensure that individual needs are met. Our results in national tests are outstanding.

Clubs and activities

From Breakfast Club to After-school Care, Craft Club to Football, there are clubs and activities to suit all interests at St Mary's. Our sports clubs are extremely popular – particularly netball, tennis and multi-sports. Drama opportunities, including LAMDA lessons and ballet are also hugely popular with our pupils. Busy families can take advantage of an early drop-off and late collection, which provides a chance for pupils to progress with their home learning.

Preparing for 'Plus 11'

Our aim is for our pupils to leave the Lower School ready to take the next step in their education with confidence. Our 'Plus 11' programme builds the necessary skills throughout the Junior years, so it's perhaps no surprise that St Mary's pupils have an excellent record of success in St Mary's Senior School Scholarship Assessments (Academic, Art, Music, Drama, Sport and the Miss Comrie Scholarship) and also in the 11+ exam for entry to the local high-performing state grammar schools.

'Coming to St Mary's has really boosted my confidence. I get involved in all sorts of activities and putting my hand up in class never worries me.'

St Mary's pupil



‘Pupils develop as confident,
talented and educated young
people, ready to make a difference
in the world around them.’

- The Independent Schools Inspectorate



Senior School

At St Mary's, each girl grows up and learns at her own pace. Every individual receives the appropriate level of support and encouragement to achieve her academic potential. There is also a wealth of opportunities for her to develop her character and personality. The atmosphere is relaxed, yet lively and purposeful, and there is a wonderful support network of staff and students.

School ethos

St Mary's core aim is to provide your daughter with an education that is nurturing, broad and rigorous.

The balance between character and academic education is carefully considered, with the former never at the expense of the latter.

At St Mary's, students grow in many ways with the opportunity to develop talents in a myriad of disciplines, often challenging preconceptions of what can be achieved.

There is an extensive network of support for all students to help them achieve in all their studies. Aspirations for students are high and staff work tirelessly to drive their continual improvement.

The size of the Senior School enables us to have regular, meaningful interactions with each individual girl. We have a rich community spirit which allows our girls to flourish, find their own unique voice and develop into ambitious and articulate individuals.

Throughout their time at the school, girls

will have a multitude of opportunities to develop skills and knowledge in a variety of settings. A rounded, and rich educational experience is a product of these many strands.

When students leave St Mary's, they do so with confidence, ambition and a deep-seated desire to make their own, individual impact on the world.



'Whatever their starting point when they join us, St Mary's girls achieve impressive results at GCSE and move on to the sixth form of their choice.'

- Miss Anwen Jones, Head of St Mary's Senior School

Senior School

Academic provision

As a non-selective school, we are proud to achieve a 100% pass rate in 22 subjects. St Mary's takes great pride in delivering a rich and broad curriculum that will stretch, challenge and inspire all students.

Teachers at St Mary's are always working to improve and develop their research-based practice. The curriculum is delivered with the highest of aspirations and with the requisite scaffolding to help all students achieve their very best.

The academic provision at St Mary's can be viewed as three strands:

Core Subjects:

All students study Maths, English, Science and Modern Foreign Languages. In Maths, the school offers Statistics and Further Maths for whom Maths is a strength, while in Science there is a choice between Combined and Separate Sciences. For Modern Foreign Languages, students can opt for Spanish, French or German and there are options for dual linguists.

Optional Subjects

With subjects such as Latin, Textiles, Photography and Psychology, as well as Art, Latin and Hospitality and Catering, there is a rich array of options on offer.

There are also many opportunities for students to extend their expertise beyond lessons; taking part in the Fashion Show, the School Play, performing at school events, as well as being a part of the school team in a range of sports. As opposed to these being a unique occurrence, students will find that there will be many other opportunities to put all their expertise into practice.

Character Education:

With timetabled enrichment lessons, girls have the opportunity to take part in extra-curricular learning, including soldering and electronics in our STEM Engineering sessions to producing their own radio show with our very own St Mary's Radio Station.

The enrichment programme runs through the very core of St Mary's learning experience, helping to extend and develop our character education of girls.

A good example of this is Year 8 and 9 girls gaining their qualification from the English Speaking Board, which helps them develop great confidence in public speaking: forming and expressing their opinions eloquently.

Senior School

Teaching at St Mary's

Lessons at St Mary's are engaging and purposeful. Teachers devote significant time to planning and sequencing lessons.

Whilst the school embraces new technologies, their use is moderated by the ever-increasing body of evidence on how learning happens and how best to teach in the classroom.

Much of our practice echoes a plethora of evidence-based research, such as Rosenshine's Principles, the Great Teaching Toolkit from Evidence Based Education along with ideas from cognitive science such as Cognitive Load Theory. This is just a small sample of the evidence used to decide the best way to deliver lessons that result in deep learning for everyone.


As a staff body passionate about teaching, we invest considerable time and effort in our Professional Learning and Development. Staff meetings are used to discuss the method and practice of teaching across the school as well as debating the merits of different research and its application in the classroom.

Further to this, we have practitioners that have completed Assessment Lead Programme qualifications and disseminate a wealth of expertise in assessment across many disciplines.

This engagement with evidence-based teaching is one of the reasons your daughter will be taught by professionals that are not just enthusiastic about their subject but who are also passionate about using the most effective methods for teaching in order to help every individual girl reach their potential.



Embedding academic excellence

A photograph of two female students in a chemistry laboratory. They are both wearing yellow short-sleeved shirts and blue plaid skirts. They are also wearing clear safety goggles. The student on the left is holding a glass dropper and adding liquid to a conical flask. The student on the right is holding a test tube and looking at the flask. On the table in front of them is a beaker of blue liquid and a small jar of blue powder. The background shows a typical classroom setting with a whiteboard and various posters.

‘The students demonstrate an enjoyment of their learning and are invariably enthusiastic and well behaved. They work well during lessons and are very supportive of each other, celebrating each other’s achievement in class.’

- The Independent Schools Inspectorate

Education for life

Wellbeing

For young people to thrive they must feel confident, relaxed and secure. Our pastoral support is at the centre of all we do and we're delighted the **national Wellbeing Award for Schools** recognises our excellence in this area. Before girls even start at St Mary's, we take time to get to know them and their families, and we have initiatives in place from induction programmes to buddy systems to help students settle in. There is a very positive culture at St Mary's and visitors often comment on how staff and students are always smiling. It is in this positive environment where the girls develop the self-confidence needed to flourish.

Environmental awareness

We are keen to foster a respect for the environment and there are numerous initiatives throughout the school aimed at improving sustainability and encouraging pupils to be eco-friendly. St Mary's is an **Ambassador Eco-School** and hosts national conferences, sharing our expertise with other schools and organisations.

Healthy lifestyles

St Mary's is an accredited **Healthy School**. Pupils are encouraged to lead healthy lifestyles now and throughout their lives. All pupils eat a hot meal at lunchtime, cooked on the premises by specialist caterers and served in a 'family dining' style – pupils sit at tables, serving each other and helping to clear away afterwards.

Duke of Edinburgh's Award

Each year a group of St Mary's students challenge themselves to complete the Duke of Edinburgh's Bronze and Silver Award, acquiring new skills, undertaking expeditions and cementing friendships. The skills developed through DofE are widely recognised in education and employment, demonstrating commitment, teamworking, strength of character and resilience.

School Houses

The spirit of competition is alive and well at St Mary's! Challenges of all kinds, from baking competitions and quizzes to sponsored cross-country races are entered into with great enthusiasm as students compete for their school house. Team-work skills are developed and friendships are forged as students of all year groups collaborate with one another.

Positions of Responsibility

From helping in the library to becoming a Digital Leader, a Lower or Senior School Head Girl, a Games Captain, a House Official or Prefect or Listener, there are many opportunities for pupils to develop their leadership skills and to make an active contribution to the school community. School Councils at both the Lower and Senior Schools give pupils a voice and their input into school life is valued. Many posts of responsibility are applied for and democratically elected.

Buddies and Listeners

All Senior School students take on a pastoral role as a 'Buddy' to a girl in the year below, helping her to settle into the school and offering support during her time at St Mary's. In this way 'Buddy Families' are formed and there are fun social events for Buddies throughout the year. Selected girls in Year 11 are trained as 'Listeners', effectively peer mentors who help support younger pupils, in conjunction with staff support.



Education for life

At St Mary's, we are mindful of the importance of preparing pupils for the wider world and for life after school. Through partnerships with internationally renowned organisations, pupils have even more opportunities which extend outside school.

Girls' Schools Association

St Mary's is an active member of the Girls' Schools Association (GSA), the professional association representing the Heads of the UK's leading girls' independent schools. St Mary's benefits from the GSA's support and regular briefings on educational matters, which helps promote high standards of education for girls. With membership of the GSA, there are many opportunities for pupils to meet with others from GSA schools for collaborative learning.

Independent Association of Preparatory Schools

St Mary's Lower School is a member of the Independent Association of Preparatory Schools, a prestigious organisation comprising the top performing preparatory schools in the world. This gives a golden opportunity to take inspiration from the very best schools, and for us to share with them our own methods for success. Students are able to integrate with other pupils in member schools while taking part in inter-school challenges, practising their social skills and pitting their wits against their contemporaries.

Round Square

St Mary's is a global member of the Round Square Organisation, a worldwide network of 200 top schools in 50 countries, which offers the school a unique framework for excellence and continuous improvement, as well as opportunities to collaborate and share experiences with like-minded peers and establishments across the globe. Students have the opportunity to attend regular conferences in places such as India, South Africa, Canada and Denmark. Students also have the opportunity to become part of St Mary's Round Square Committee where there are various positions of responsibility.

Other international connections

St Mary's is an International School, accredited by the British Council, and this gives us opportunities to forge links with schools and organisations around the world. Exchange visits with our partner school in the Netherlands, our lively annual International Week, and an ongoing programme of talks by international and cultural groups all encourage students to become involved in the global community.

'The school feels like one big family, where everyone knows and respects each other. It is a family that I am so honoured to be part of. I know that I will take my experience of school with me throughout my whole life and I am truly proud to be a St Mary's girl, through and through.'

A former Senior School Head Girl

Nurturing talent



Joining St Mary's

You are welcome to visit St Mary's with a view to your child joining the school. Please contact the Registrar on 01206 594180 to make an appointment, or come along to our Open Days in autumn and spring.

Admissions

The next step is to register your child for a place by completing the Registration Form, which can be found on our website: www.stmaryscolchester.org.uk/admissions/register Alternatively, a paper copy is available on request. The Kindergarten Admissions Fee or School Registration Fee is also payable at this point. Your child will then be invited to take part in a Familiarisation session or Taster Day at St Mary's prior to any joining assessment and the offer of a place.


Early registration is recommended as date of registration is considered when offering places. Offers of places are subject to availability and the admission requirements of the school at the time offers are made. A copy of the current edition of the Terms and Conditions will be supplied on request.

Scholarships

Each year a number of St Mary's Scholarships are awarded to prospective Year 7 students in recognition of achievement, to acknowledge excellence and show the importance the school places on various areas of the curriculum. Scholarships are for discretionary amounts of fee remission. All scholarships are awarded on merit and in open competition. An annual review of each Scholarships will take place and, where a student has done her best to uphold the conditions of the scholarship, this review is normally a formality for the duration of her school career.

In order to qualify for a scholarship, girls must meet normal academic entry requirements. Academic scholarships are offered for 11+ entry to girls based on exceptional performance in the Year 7 Entrance Assessment. Students who show particular aptitude in Art, Drama, Music and Sport are encouraged to apply for the relevant Scholarships. 'Miss Comrie' Scholarships can also be awarded to girls who show all-round ability and who the Principal considers will benefit from a St Mary's education.





Encouraging, developing and celebrating excellence

Senior School Scholarships

Scholars act as role models to other students and as ambassadors for St Mary's. They are encouraged to make the most of the wealth of opportunities available to extend, broaden and strengthen their talents.

Scholarships available

Academic, Art, Drama, Music and Sport Scholarships are available to girls wishing to join the Senior School at the start of Year 7. In addition, our prestigious 'Miss Comrie' Scholarship is awarded to those with the potential to make a substantial contribution to the life of the school. Honorary awards may also be given where candidates may not have met the expected level for a Scholarship. There are the same expectations of Award holders and they receive the same benefits, except the fee remission.

Scholarship requirements

Applications can be made for Art, Drama, Music and Sport Scholarships, and shortlisted candidates are invited to attend assessment days. Academic Scholarships are awarded on the basis of achievement in the St Mary's entrance assessment, while 'Miss Comrie' Scholarships are awarded following Principal and independent panel interviews. Those applying for Scholarships must be able to demonstrate a high level of ability in their particular subject. Music Scholar applicants for example are expected to have at least Grade 3 or equivalent standard, ideally in two instruments, or one instrument and voice. Sport Scholar applicants are expected to demonstrate achievement and/or genuine potential in at least two sports, as well as good leadership skills. There is no financial assessment for Scholarship applicants. All are awarded solely on merit and there is no set limit to the number awarded in one year of entry.

Benefits of Scholarships

Scholars are encouraged to take advantage of the many opportunities to further extend their skills, and are individually monitored to ensure they are given the support and extension they need to realise their potential. Scholars take lead roles, for example in exhibitions, sports fixtures, productions and concerts and sit on subject councils where applicable. Scholars also take a lead role in their subject area, whether at events, exhibitions, in productions or concerts. Scholars receive a school certificate and are recognised on our Scholars' board. Scholarships attract a fee remission, at the discretion of the Principal.

Expectations of Scholars

Scholars must have a positive approach in, and commitment to, the subject in which they are a Scholar. They are expected to attend key sessions such as rehearsals or squad practices, and to show good conduct, aptitude, participation and progress at all times. Scholars also act as ambassadors for the school and as role models to their peers. It is possible for students to be awarded more than one Scholarship but please bear in mind that the Scholar must be prepared to meet the expectations of every Scholarship held.

School Contacts

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