



NURTURING MIND, BODY, AND SOUL

It is never too early to learn the practice of mindfulness, and Joyce believes that it definitely has a place in the early childhood curriculum. There is a special place in the Preschool aptly named the "Dream Room", where children can take themselves away for restful, quiet time during the day, or simply take some time to quietly explore the properties of light and shadow. "They love mindfulness," she continues. "They'll go into the Dream Room and they're all respectful of the quiet, listening to music, or having a teacher guide them through something. It really grounds them."

Fostering children's brain development through nutrition adds to the Preschool's overall approach to health and wellbeing. The onsite cook who prepares wholefood-based meals also means parents never have to worry about making their children's lunch boxes!

French is on the timetable once a week, with a dedicated French teacher, and the children are encouraged to spread their wings and participate in other co-curricular activities such as performing arts and sporting skills.

TRANSITION TO SCHOOL

A term before they are due to start school, children who continue their education at the Saint Kentigern Schools are involved in a comprehensive Transition to School programme. These children have a special extension time each day where they work closely with a teacher, ensuring they get the best start to their schooling life. Children are taken for regular visits to either Saint Kentigern Girls' School or Boys' School to spend time in the class they will be starting in, as well as becoming comfortable with the school environment itself.



A SENSE OF BELONGING

Over the past 70 years, the Saint Kentigern Trust has become the largest church schools' group in New Zealand. Saint Kentigern Preschool, together with Saint Kentigern College, Saint Kentigern Boys' School, and Saint Kentigern Girls' School, provides independent Presbyterian values-based education for girls and boys aged three to 18 years on three campuses across Auckland. There is a true sense of community and belonging for the whole family at Saint Kentigern, and it begins right from the get-go during the preschool years, with events and functions for parents to meet one another. "It is really beneficial for the children when parents and caregivers are involved in their education," says Joyce. "That connectedness adds to what is an incredible learning experience for the children."

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Learning for *life*

We sat down with Saint Kentigern Preschool Principal, Nikki Joyce, to talk about how learning at a quality preschool can empower children to be independent learners, thinkers, and doers.

At Saint Kentigern Preschool, their programme fosters the development of two skills that can truly build children's learning confidence: creativity, and teamwork. Here's how.

CRITICAL THINKING

The power of play has been recognised by early childhood educators for 20 years. Contrary to what people may think, play isn't simple – it is, instead, complex. Learning through play at Saint Kentigern Preschool isn't based around aimless, random interaction. It is about preparing an environment

that invites young children to examine, question, predict, test, and investigate. Through the thoughtful planning of the teaching team, children learn to think critically about the world around them, as well as refine the skills necessary to collaborate with others. A high level of teacher engagement with the children makes this programme successful, which is supported by the Preschool's impressively high teacher-to-child ratio of one to six. "This high ratio means that teachers get the time to engage with the children at length, and take cues from their curiosity and imagination," says Joyce. "They have time to really

deepen and extend the child's interest in the topic, offering them a breadth of knowledge rather than just superficial learning."

COLLABORATION AND PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

In a preschool classroom, children generally, naturally assign themselves into groups. At Saint Kentigern Preschool, there is a particular emphasis on playing and creating together. Through collaboration, the children learn to predict and respond to other people, and this helps them to interpret and acknowledge others' ideas, understanding that not everyone is the same. Joyce refers to it as "learning to live in a democracy". Children develop the ability to "debate ideas without, you know, losing the plot!" Playing and working together in a group with a mutual objective helps them learn to share, negotiate, resolve conflicts, and be accountable for their actions.

