

## Pre-school children are thriving at nursery with strong links to St Jude's Church

**T**HE children shriek with delight as they blow enormous bubbles, slap paint onto easels and create play-dough shapes.

Nearby, staff are helping two and three-year-olds to glue together cardboard boxes to become make-believe cars and planes, or to play with water and sand.

It's a typical afternoon in the messy play room at St Jude's Church Nursery, as the children get the chance to spend an hour doing the kind of creative play they might not manage at home.

Next door, some of the other nursery children are playing in a ball pool, climbing on an indoor climbing frame and dressing up for role-playing games. In another room, they can do jigsaws, puzzles and drawing, as they learn about their world through play and gentle teaching.

Many church halls will host nurseries and pre-schools, but St Jude's Church Nursery is one of the few run directly by a church. It was launched in the 1960s by a retired teacher who rented space in the then church hall to teach 20 children.

Now it is a thriving, Ofsted-registered nursery, catering for up to 130 children every week, between 8am and 6pm. It is run by a management committee drawn from St Jude's congregation members, nursery staff and parents, and employs around 30 members of staff.

And it's situated in Silver Street, just off Kings Road in Southsea, serving families who live in Old Portsmouth, Somers Town and Southsea – including those of other faiths or no faith. It caters for those aged between two and four, before they start in reception classes in school.

It's part of the church's commitment to serve the local community, and there are strong links between church and nursery. Clergy regularly visit, congregation members are employed as staff, and church families are involved as parent helpers.

The families of children who attend are encouraged to come to the church's all-age Sunday services. The nursery also hosts Christmas nativities and Easter services. And a small group of Christian nursery staff even pray each month for specific prayer requests from families.

Nursery manager Jan Parkins said: "I've worked at the nursery for 18 years, starting as a parent helper when my youngest son came here. It is a great place to work, and a caring, supportive environment where children can enjoy themselves, feel safe and learn about taking those first steps of independence before they get to school.

"Our Christian ethos means that we have a very clear set of values, which those of other faiths or no faith appreciate. The links with the church are strong, and so

are the links with St Jude's C of E Primary School, where many of the children go to after they've been here.

"We also get involved in the lives of the families whose children come here, getting to know them as friends. It's no coincidence that those who came to the nursery in the early years now send their children or grandchildren here."

And St Jude's worshipper Jon Hallatt, who chairs the management committee said: "The nursery is a key part of the outreach of St Jude's Church in Southsea. The staff are our greatest asset, many having worked there for 10 or more years.

morning or mid-afternoon snack, and those staying for the whole day bring their own packed lunch.

Subsidised places are offered for those children who are eligible for government funding. Other sessions are priced typically at £9.30 for a three-hour session. Early sessions from 8am-9am and late ones from 4pm-6pm can also be offered. And in the holidays, the nursery even offers a playscheme.

For more details, see [www.stjudeschurchnursery.co.uk](http://www.stjudeschurchnursery.co.uk), ring 023-9282 1726 or email [info@stjudeschurchnursery.co.uk](mailto:info@stjudeschurchnursery.co.uk).

# Church-run nursery is caring and fun!

Above: staff member Claire Cranston in the outdoor play area with Bella Scholes, 3; left and far left: scenes from a typical nursery day, including the creative messy room and physical play in the hall;

## WHAT THE PARENTS SAY

"It has been wonderful to be involved with the nursery. I dread the day when I don't have children that I can send! When I drop my children off, they are not going to people who just work there. They are going to women who are like aunts and nannies to them. I feel like they care and want to look after our children.

"I like the layout and the structure of the day, in that they can go around different rooms and do different activities in each room, rather than it being a free-for-all." **Gemma Braithwaite, mum to Charlie, aged 6, who was at the nursery, Freddie, 4, who is there now, and seven-month-old Mamie**

"It has always felt like a home from home, run by people who have become part of our extended family. Both our boys have been there and are now at school, but Thomas still uses the walking bus and goes there after school, because it is secure and familiar.

"There's always lots to do, and because they move from room to room to do different activities, it's better than the kind of set-up where there is just one big room. It will be a sad final day when we don't go there any more."

**Trudy Mansfield, mum to Ben, aged 7, and Thomas, 4, who were both at the nursery**

"They do a great job, they are very professional and they really look out for our kids. They have one person assigned to each child, and regular meetings with parents to let us know how they are doing. The children enjoy it and get to bring home all sorts of creative things they've made during the day.

"The premises look quite small, but they make really good use of them, with outdoor activities, a big hall and creative rooms with sand and water. Our children have really thrived there." **Gareth Matthews, dad to Ethan, aged 6, and Brooke, 5, who were at the nursery, and one-year-old Joash, who will go there**

"Ben really loved it at nursery. It was like one big happy family. He loved the outdoor space and always brought home creations he had made.

"He had such an easy transition to school, and I think that's because the nursery prepares children really well. They do PE, so they can practice getting changed, they get used to sitting and listening, and they line up to go from room to room for different activities. I was also a parent helper once every half-term, and it was lovely to work with the kids." **Liz Morrison, mum to Ben, aged 5, and Rebecca 1**



Lunchtime at the nursery

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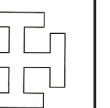
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