



## Top-Tips for being School Ready

As we begin a new academic year at St. Margaret's, it is the last year of nursery for our 3-4 year olds. The Early Years Team's focus will be on preparing these children for the next step - Reception 2023. Over the coming year we invite you to join us and help prepare your pre-school child following our monthly top-tips, fun games and expert advice. This will help you with a smooth transition into 'Big School' in September 2023.

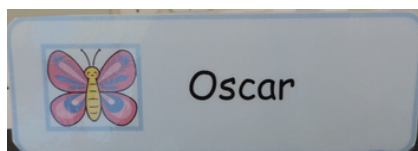
### September Tip: Recognising their name

This month Mrs Raby, Nursery Coordinator, has a simple task that you can bring into your daily routine to begin that all important preparation.

"During the Nursery day the children are encouraged to recognise their own name. Each child has a labelled 'cubby' shelf where they store bags, snacks and precious comforts from home. The cubby will change location daily so the first task of the day is to find their own name.



At home you can label coat pegs, drink cups and lay place names at the table that will support and encourage your child to recognise their name in different places. Please ensure that the name is spelt with a capital letter then small letters as shown below.



Good luck and do let us know how you get on!"



## **Top-Tips for being School Ready**

The academic year is now in full flow and Reception children are fully involved in school life here at St. Margaret's. The Early Years Team's focus on preparing the children whilst in Nursery has been so helpful for Mrs Barber and Mrs Gladen, our Reception teachers, that we hope our top-tips will support you at home and help prepare your pre-school child. Our monthly top-tips, fun games and expert advice will aid a smooth transition into 'Big School' in September 2023.

### **October Tip: Buttons and zips - fine motor skills**



This month we asked Mrs Barber, our Reception Teacher and Head of Early Years, what skill the children are really finding a bit tricky and how we can help them prepare.

"For many children getting dressed or changed is always supported by an adult, however, when the children are at school, they are often required to change from PE kit to uniform and we encourage them to do this as much by themselves as they can. This involves fiddly buttons, zips and at St Margaret's, ties.

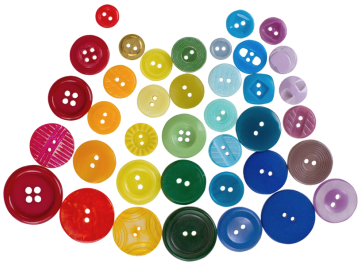
In Nursery and Reception we have set up a 'Funky Fingers' corner to help strengthen fine motor skills for little hands, this will also support with pencil control and writing skills as they go through the year. The table has school shirts, PE tops and similar items to practise this skill. Other activities include using tweezers to pick up small beads and sort into pots and tracing their name with small colourful stickers.

As we go through the year we celebrate the progress the children make. It's the small things that make such a difference."





See if you can set up a 'Funky Fingers' table at home and follow some of these top tips.

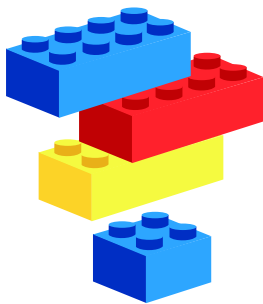


How many buttons or beads can you thread on a lace or string?

Use tweezers to see how many pieces of pasta, rice or pom-poms you can pick up.

Make a bird feeder by threading Cheerios on to string and hang it outside.

Use finger paints to make a fingerprint picture, painting or collage.



Use small building blocks to make a construction. Can you push the bricks together and then pull them apart?

Wind pipe cleaners around twigs to make mini snakes or curly worms.

Use pegs to decorate the top of a flower pot or toy box.

Place coins in a piggy bank. How many can you count?



Use colourful sticky dots to peel and stick to create a dotty picture.

Try using the sticky dots to trace your name.



# Top-Tips for being School Ready

Children grow and develop rapidly in their first five years across the four main areas of development. These are motor (physical), language and communication, cognitive and social/emotional.

Last month we looked at developing children's fine motor skills with activities involving such things as play dough, stickers and doing up buttons. This month we are going to concentrate on cognitive development, looking at how children think, explore and figure things out.

Mrs Gladen, Reception teacher, has come up with some simple activities that help develop knowledge, skills and problem solving, which will help children to think and understand the world around them, therefore continuing that preparation for Reception in 2023.

## November Tip: Cognitive Development



"There are many ways that you, as parents, can support your child's cognitive development through play.

Simple board games like 'Snakes and Ladders' or card games such as 'Go Fish' or 'Snap' are all excellent activities. Children are required to take turns understand and follow simple instructions, and it develops a longer attention span, ideal for that transition to Reception.

Memory games are fun and challenging, building concentration skills, a longer attention span and require thought.

A particular favourite in the Nursery at St Margaret's is hiding a variety of items on a tray under a cloth. The children need to look and remember what is on the tray before it is covered over, and then have to name the items. This activity gives instant feedback, is rewarding and just a little frustrating, encouraging children to try again. Puzzles are also perfect for cognitive development. Which way round does the piece go? Can you find a piece that has green on it? Which piece do you think will fit here? Are all questions that can be asked to encourage children to figure out the puzzle."





## **Top-Tips for being School Ready**

At St Margaret's, we encourage healthy eating and, together with support from parents and a nutritionist, produced a Healthy Guide to Snacks for our families in relation to all items brought into school for breaktime.

There is a wide variety of tempting treats for children, and while we encourage fruit or vegetable sticks, we also understand that there is a place for such delicious items.

### **December Tip: Cooking and Healthy Eating**



Snack time in the Nursery takes place both in the morning and afternoon with a delicious lunch sandwiched in-between. Snack time is a chance for the children to recharge but is also a social time to sit and discuss what they have in their boxes, what might be their favourite food and see what other children maybe eating and enjoying.

Lunch is cooked fresh daily by our wonderful catering team and always has a wide variety of choice, including a vegetarian option and a selection of salad and vegetables. It is again, a social time to all sit together and enjoy food.

The Nursery have cooking lessons built into their timetable each week providing the children with the opportunity to touch, taste, smell and experience a wide variety of foods.

They may make creatures using fruit and vegetables, dinner for a giant or enough porridge to feed Goldilocks and the Three Bears! Every experience with food is positive and encourages the children to explore healthy options and try new textures and tastes.

We do hope you will try making the Reindeer cookies, they are just the same as Gingerbread men!



# Gingerbread Man or Reindeer Cookie?!

## Ingredients



- 175g dark muscovado sugar
- 85g golden syrup
- 100g butter
- 350g plain flour, plus extra for dusting
- 1tsp bicarbonate of soda
- 1tbsp ground ginger
- 1tsp ground cinnamon
- 1 egg, beaten



## Method

### STEP 1

- Melt the sugar, golden syrup and butter in a saucepan, then bubble for 1-2 mins. Leave to cool for about 10 mins.

### STEP 2

- Tip the flour, bicarbonate of soda and spices into a large bowl. Add the warm syrup mixture and the egg, stir everything together, then gently knead in the bowl until smooth and streak-free. The dough will firm up once cooled. Wrap in cling film and chill for at least 30 mins.

### STEP 3

- Remove the dough from the fridge, leave at room temperature until softened. Heat the oven to 200C/180C fan/gas 6 and line two baking trays with baking parchment.

### STEP 4

- Roll out the dough to the thickness of a £1 coin, then cut out gingerbread/reindeer with the cutter. Re-roll the excess dough and keep cutting until it's all used up.

### STEP 5

- Lift the biscuits onto the trays and bake for 10-12 mins, swapping the trays over halfway through cooking. Leave to cool on the trays for 5 mins, then transfer to a wire rack to cool completely. Use the icing to decorate the biscuits as you wish, and stick on chocolate or sweets for eyes/buttons. Leave to dry for 1-2 hrs. Will keep for up to three days in an airtight container.





## **Top-Tips for being School Ready**

There is more to maths than counting, and at St Margaret's we are always finding opportunities to support our little ones with numbers, shapes, space and measures. Children learn maths through play and every day experiences, the more meaningful to them, the better.

Developing a strong grounding in number is essential so that all children develop the necessary building blocks to excel mathematically.

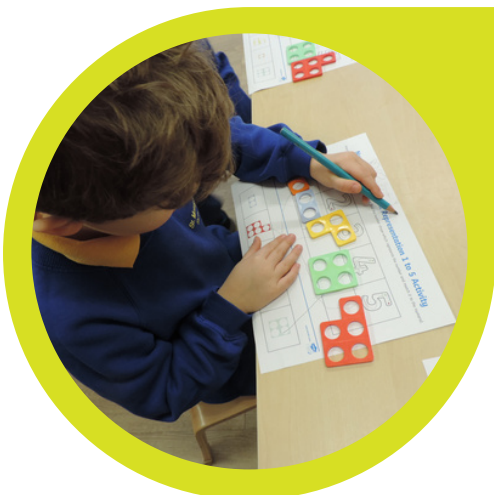
Maths is one of the four specific areas within the Early Years Foundation Stage Framework and it is divided into two areas; Numbers and Space and Shapes and Measure.

### **January Tip: Number Recognition and Counting**

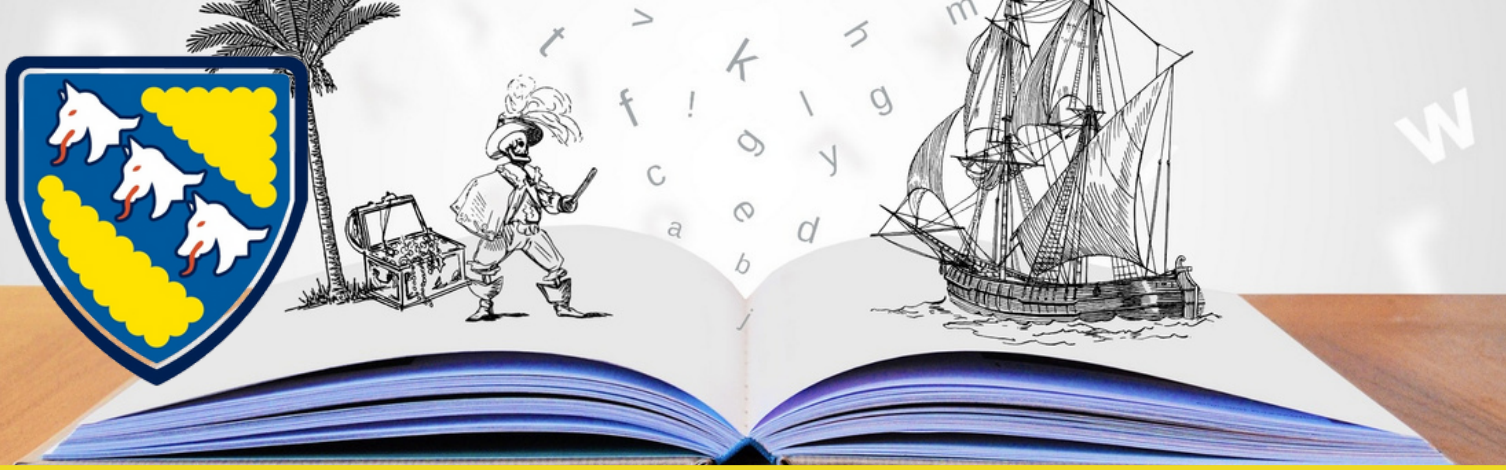
Mrs Raby explains here how we support number recognition and counting within the Nursery setting and offers a few ideas to support at home.

"Stories, songs, rhymes and games that have a mathematical content help children understand number systems, and we give the children time to talk, play and practice using number in various different ways. This may include toys and counters, however we also have more specialist number equipment including Numicon, that support children to make connections between number and imagery.

the children are counting all the time, whether it be the number of children in Nursery that day or the number of teddies they can find hidden in shaving foam. The opportunities are endless.



At home counting everyday objects, fingers, colouring pencils or just steps up to bed become daily activities that help children understand the number system. Singing songs such as 'Five Cheeky Monkeys' and using your fingers to represent the numbers will help children picture the number and how it is made up. This is all just the beginning of mathematics learning and what will become part of everyday learning here at St Margaret's Prep."



# Top-Tips for being School Ready

## February Tip - Story Telling

This month Mrs Raby, Nursery Co-ordinator at St Margaret's, introduces 'Helicopter Stories', bringing the children's own short stories to life through role play. It is a fabulous way of developing early literacy skills, particularly within speaking, listening and writing. Helicopter stories values children's creativity and imaginative play, whilst supporting communication and language development, confidence and turn taking, creativity and idea making, ability to listen and understand, teamwork and collaboration.



"We have loved telling our stories in Nursery this month. 'Helicopter stories' is the name given to the process that we used. Each child tells their story and it is written down, word for word, into a 'special sparkly' story book. The story is read back to the storyteller by the teacher, and they are asked which character they would like to act on the 'stage'. The stage is marked out on the carpet using masking tape. The children sit around the stage to watch, participate, bow, and applaud. The story is then read out by the teacher, and as each character is introduced, a child in the audience is asked if they would like to act that part. If they would prefer not to, the next child is asked.

Once the story is finished, the actors all take a bow and the audience clap to say thank you.

As a Nursery Practitioner, one of the things I love about Helicopter Stories is that, often those children, after being initially very apprehensive about either telling a story, or acting in one, become engaged and enthused to tell their story after watching their peers. Children's stories can be as short as one sentence or as long as one page of my special sparkly book. A little reminder is given if the story is on its way to being an epic!"





Hear are some examples of the wonderful collection of stories Mrs Raby has in her very special sparkly story book..

#### Alistair's story, age 4

Once upon a time sharks came to a party. And then a bigger shark came and they ran away. Then they come back in one minute and then they had a shark cake and lots of presents. And then they eat it all up.

It's a friendly shark and doesn't chase anyone away.

And that's the end.

#### Leonora's story, age 4

There was a butterfly. The butterfly flied to a flower but there was no blossom in it. She tried to find out if there was nectar in it. And she flied to another flower to see if that one had nectar on it. And he thought it tasted nice and he thought it had nectar in it. And it found a flower that did have some nectar in it.

The end

#### Phoebe's story, age 4

Once upon a time there was a little mermaid and she lives in a cottage and she sleeps in it. And 2 mermaids on the water, there was a daddy mermaid too. And she walked and she fell over and she had a bruise. She climbed up a tree and there was a little mermaid baby up a tree and she was in a buggy. And she pushed her and went to the park. And that's finished.



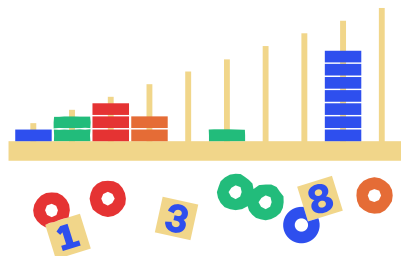
You can find out more about Helicopter Stories by following the link  
<https://helicopterstories.co.uk/>



# Top-Tips for being School Ready

## March Tip - Circle Time

Circle time in the Nursery brings children together at the start of every day. It is an opportunity to prepare for the day ahead and discuss the upcoming activities. The morning circle time routines are important because they give children a strong sense of security and stability, which offers them the feeling of control over their environment. When the day flows smoothly, and there is an element of predictability in what's coming, children feel safe, secure, and confident in an adult's care. In Circle Time, children learn to listen and pay attention as everybody takes their turn, either to share their ideas, and their toys or photos. Having this as a part of their daily activity helps them develop their listening and communication skills, and, allows them to develop the confidence to express themselves.



Mrs Raby explains here about Circle time in the Nursery at St Margaret's

"In Nursery, during circle time, the children's registration activity is to find the photo of themselves. Once everyone has done this, the photos are counted up to see how many children and teachers are in Nursery that day. We then sing songs to learn the days of the week and months of the year. Next, we talk about what we will be doing during the day and this is done by using a visual timetable. We celebrate birthdays and the children share their own successes and daily adventures.

Finally, we choose two helpers of the day. Their jobs are to be the line leaders and to help set up the chairs, water bottles and name labels for lunch."

Why not try your own 'circle time' at home in the morning, introducing a plan for the day with highlights such as lunch and play time. Talk about the days of the week, what the weather is like and how that might affect your day. Will you be seeing other children, visiting the park or going on a trip? There is a beautiful day ahead of you.





# Top-Tips for being School Ready

## April Tip - Independence

During the Summer term, preparation for our older Nursery children's move to Reception commences. They eat their lunch in the hall with the Pre-Prep children and there are increased visits to Reception classrooms for activities and more structured learning and we encourage them to be more independent during their daily routine, such as putting on their coats and putting their snack boxes away.



Mrs Raby explains, "Our Nursery Butterflies are becoming increasingly independent as they get dressed and undressed. For example, putting coats on and doing up zips. We encourage all our children to do these things for themselves, with us standing by for support and gradually reducing our help until the children can do each step on their own."

"This term, children are changing back into their school uniforms after their PE lessons. This involves undressing, putting their PE kits in their bags (in their OVN bags preferably!), and putting on their school uniform.

Again, the children are encouraged to do as much as they can by themselves, with the staff there to offer suggestions and assist when help is needed. We start off with lots of back to front jumpers, inside out t-shirts and banana feet (shoes on the wrong feet). It is important that we still praise the children for their attempts.

"We are also encouraging the children to unpack their bags at the beginning of the day, to be independent and responsible for their own things. They put their water bottles and snack in the boxes and put their bags and coats on their pegs. Once afternoon snack is finished, the children pack their bags with library books, water bottles, snack boxes, artwork and put on their coats."

Why not try to get ready earlier for a trip out, to allow your toddler time to put their shoes and coat on by themselves? With lots of praise and encouragement it will help with their independence and self-confidence!