

Nursery education day by day

The educational work of the St Nikolausstiftung



Preface



Dear Parents and Guardians,

“The best thing about life is all the things you get to do.”
– These words, spoken by six-year-old Lena, get to the heart of what every educational institution aims to achieve, namely awaken and maintain children’s curiosity and delight about life and the many different opportunities it has to offer. In this spirit, nursery should be a time of joy and excitement for every child – linked with plenty of positive memories of the children and adults encountered during that time.

The aim of this brochure is to inform you about the work and educational philosophy of the St Nikolausstiftung, and over the next few pages, we introduce you to aspects of everyday life at the nursery. More detailed information on our educational approach and its basis is provided in the accompanying “Info” boxes highlighted in the text.

We hope this will give you an insight into the St. Nikolausstiftung’s approach to teaching and that you enjoy reading it.

Yours, St. Nikolausstiftung

OVERVIEW

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The educational approach of the St. Nikolausstiftung

About the St. Nikolausstiftung

Your child is attending a nursery run by the St. Nikolaus Archdiocese of Vienna, which supports around 90 nurseries and crèches in Vienna. As part of this network, our nurseries benefit from centralised management by our administrative office. The educational approach of St. Nikolausstiftung and therefore of the nurseries is the responsibility of the Education Department, which is responsible for appointing staff, providing technical support, supporting and monitoring teaching and planning peripatetic team deployment. The administrative office also calculates all nursery fees, manages grant funding from the City of Vienna and oversees maintenance and cleaning work, and new building projects. The administrative office is also happy to help you with any concerns or questions you may have about your contract and payments.

Nurseries' educational mission

When your child joins a nursery, it becomes part of the community in an educational institution – and this means they are taking their first steps on their very own educational path. “Nurseries educate” is an idea, an educational mission that the St. Nikolausstiftung takes seriously and which is rooted in the Vienna Kindergarten Law (Wiener Kindergartenengesetz).

Our organisation's educational approach is based on compulsory, legally binding **curricula** and the **education quality standards** developed and stipulated by the St. Nikolausstiftung. Our work is also based on the national framework for religious education (Religionspädagogischen BildungsRahmenPlan) for primary educational institutions.

Our teachers and assistants attend mandatory specialist training sessions on these basics and are supported by the administrative office education section, for instance by inspectors and specialist teaching advisors.

Our educational philosophy

Children who attend a St. Nikolausstiftung nursery should be cared for, supported, respected and have fun every day. This is the only way a child can develop and grow – education is much easier and comes more naturally in an attentive and supportive environment.

All staff therefore practise “attentive education” – which means that we aim to respect and appreciate every child for what they are and pay attention to them. This enables nursery to be an empowering experience for every child to experience. Our mission statement sets out the core values underlying our day-to-day work, for example: *“Every girl and boy is unique and at the centre of everything we do. (...) Every child has the right to be respected, valued, loved and to be independent.”* Our educational principles are also closely linked with holistic support and encouragement for children in their education and development. We try to include children actively in the design of their learning processes: *“Our teaching is based on close observation and reflection: these are the key elements of a child-centred approach.”*

We try to keep the wellbeing of the individual child in mind in all the decisions we make, regardless of the competing everyday demands of running nurseries such as staff changes, sickness absences or the predetermined framework.

Transparency is key to our collaboration with parents. We hope that you will let us know of any questions or concerns regarding the nursery and/or your child. (See page 26, “Your Contacts”)



INFO

STATUTORY ROLE OF NURSERIES

“1. The role of nurseries is to bring additional specialist educational knowledge and methods to bear, to assist families with all aspects of children's personal development, enhance their ability to live in communities and support their physical, mental and spiritual development. The educational concept is to educate and care for children with different cultural and social backgrounds together and to tailor education and care to their individual physical and psychological needs. Learning is holistic and playful, and takes place in classroom formats that are appropriate to children's ages and stages of development, and that avoid rigid time structures and prescribed teaching units.

The right learning environment, such as child-friendly rooms and developmental games and activities, all aim to encourage children to exercise their creativity. Nurseries should have a cooperative and democratic style of leadership that avoids fixed assumptions about gender roles and enables them to provide children with guidance on their path to living an independent and responsible life in the community. These institutions also promote a healthy work-life balance for men and women alike.”

Extract from the Vienna Kindergarten Law, Version dated 15.07. 2019

Living our approach to religious education

As a Catholic organisation, we start from the assumption that engaging with religion enhances children's development. We see it as one of the educational tasks of nursery to enable children to become familiar with religions and traditions. Children are open to questions about life, they have the capacity for wonder and the ability to philosophise, they are interested in talking about God and the world and every day they raise issues about life, e.g. how the group works together, or the death of a pet.

We have many lively and varied celebrations and rituals, which always take account of children, their needs and the world they live in. Children of all religions are welcome at our nurseries, and we try to ensure that all children and their families feel valued at our celebrations. Since seasonal festivals are very important to us, the St. Nikolausstiftung has published two brochures, *Festivals and Celebrations*, and *Celebrating St. Nicholas' Day at Nursery*, which are available from nurseries free of charge.

Priests or named representatives of the parish in which nurseries are situated pay regular visits.



Diversity and Empowerment

We see the diversity of children – e.g. the different languages they speak – as a resource. Children bring their family situation (living environment) with them to nursery – and we thus value all lifestyles and types of family equally, and give them equal time in discussions.

We take a gender-sensitive approach to education in order to create the space to break down stereotypes and perceptions of roles. Thus regardless of gender, children are allowed to cry, play football, cook, etc. All children have equal opportunities to develop in all areas of education.

Being able to formulate wishes and needs is an important skill for children to acquire, and we encourage lively interaction on a daily basis to encourage this. Nurseries involve children in discussion of issues that affect them personally, enabling them to practise articulating their needs, and having and expressing opinions.



Everyday life at nursery

Arrival

To enable your child to prepare for each new day in the nursery, we help them to acclimatise to the group. Which children are there already? Are there any new toys, or can I continue with a game that I began the previous day? Children often have rituals when they arrive: for example, they watch daddy until he has gone round the corner of the building. Sometimes, particularly in the first hour of the day, your child will be cared for in what we call a ‘Sammelgruppe’ (settling-in time).

Snapshots of our daily routine

A daily routine provides children with variety as well as regularly recurring activities. For most of the day, children have a free choice of the games and toys provided

by the teachers. The children can also decide who they want to play with. They can paint, draw and do cutting in the creative area, build things in the construction area or play games like “Snail’s Pace Race” with other children and their teacher or assistant. Teachers also lead small group activities tailored to ongoing educational aims and topics, e.g. listening to a story, cooking together, making music, exercising in the garden or the exercise area, and much more. Sometimes children also spend time outside the nursery: excursions, days in the wood, theatre visits and concerts are planned according to their interests and stages of development. There are regular visits to playgrounds.

INDUCTION

By induction, we mean the first few weeks when children are accompanied to the nursery by a trusted adult. During this period, children build trust in their carer at nursery and get to know the daily routine. Another important step is saying goodbye to their carer in the family and then greeting them again. The process

of transition between family and nursery is designed jointly by all those involved: parents, teachers and the children.

Read more about this in the “Induction handbook” brochure, which is available from nurseries free of charge.

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PARTICIPATION

St. Nikolausstiftung nurseries provide children with an environment where they can grow into independent, self-confident and self-aware individuals. Child-appropriate opportunities for participating in, designing and helping with decision-making about teaching enables children to learn and take increasing responsibility for themselves and for others. Nurseries thus make an important contribution to democratic processes in our society.

Involving children in decision-making gives them the right to have a say about their own lives. Participation enables children not only to have an input into decisions about personal matters, but also into matters that concern the community, such as the everyday routine they share with others, e.g. agreeing rules for the group, designing play areas and deciding what materials are available.



Many nurseries have a “morning circle” once a day where all the children get together with the teacher. This meeting allows children to exchange views on specific things that have happened, provides an overview of which children are present and/or absent and enables staff to plan for the day etc. Previous projects can also be discussed here and future projects planned together. Children thus get the opportunity to have a say in and be involved with issues that directly affect them.

Everyday activities

Resting and sleeping are important aspects of nurseries’ daily routine. Coexisting in a group and learning by playing take a lot of energy for your child and we therefore give them the opportunity to rest and sleep. We take care to build quiet times into children’s daily routine to allow them to have some time to themselves, and to rest and recuperate. Every child is given the opportunity to have a midday nap after

lunch if they need it. It is important for children to be able to make their own decisions about this, so that sleeping has good associations for them and they connect it with pleasant emotions and find their own rhythm. Familiar cuddly toys and a cosy atmosphere can help, as can someone keeping an eye on the child while they sleep.

It is also vital that children have autonomy and are given a say when it comes to **how mealtimes are structured**: we let children choose whether and how much to eat and drink. We don’t force any child to eat or taste something, or clean their plate. It’s important to us that children like eating and learn to listen to their body. Children are given a range of foods to choose from, they butter their own bread, cut up their own vegetables and are given support from adults as appropriate to their capabilities. Eating with others

should be fun. We take individual children’s needs into account and cater to religious and cultural eating habits. We have a flexible approach to morning and afternoon snack time, and children can decide for themselves when within a given time frame they want to eat. This means they also decide when to finish playing a game in order to eat – and whom they eat with.

We create opportunities for children to get the **exercise** they need during the day, so that they can develop their physical skills.

Your child will be introduced to different types of exercise on a daily basis, in a friendly environment free from unnecessary regimentation and without any pressure to perform or succeed. We balance times for free, independent experimentation with movement, opportunities for children to have physical experience of their own body, different styles of movement and targeted exercises to promote basic motor skills (running, jumping, pushing, pulling, sliding, rolling, climbing, throwing, catching ...).

All aspects of our exercise programme aim to promote children's overall development, and ensure they enjoy their experience and are involved in the planning process.

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KINDERGARTEN PLUS

The development of children's social and emotional skills has always been the basis of all learning and a key area of focus for the educational work of the St. Nikolausstiftung. Many of the foundation's nurseries have therefore introduced the "Kindergarten Plus" programme, created especially for this area of development by the Deutsche Kinderliga (German Children's League). The programme's playful modules allow children to get to grips with issues relating to their emotional and social development, such as how to deal with your feelings, friendships, boundaries and rules. In addition to nursery activities, it also provides children with ideas for games and discussions at home.

Dealing with your own body and your own feelings

Every child has the right to determine what happens to their own body. They decide which types of touch they do or do not like, who may touch them and how, when and where. If a child gives a teacher a hug, for instance, or wants physical contact and climbs onto an assistant's lap, this is a need that is coming from the child and we will meet it as well as we can. Since children of nursery school age can be interested in the bodies of other children as well as their own, it is also the job of teaching staff to support them carefully and provide the right framework for this important stage of their development.

We answer children's questions about love, sexuality, and conceiving and having children in a way that is appropriate to their stage of development. Children's questions are taken seriously and answers given that are appropriate to their age. We use the correct terminology for parts of the body, relationships, feelings etc. As far as possible, children learn how to look after their bodies and keep them clean and thus develop confidence in dealing with them. This includes discussions of feelings, even when they don't have an obvious cause: children have access at all times to materials on the topic such as picture books like *The Colour Monster* or picture cards dealing with feelings. The *Kindergarten plus* project, whose aims include dealing with emotions, has been running for some time now in some of our nurseries. (see Kindergarten plus Info box)



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SEX EDUCATION – (SEXUAL) VIOLENCE PREVENTION STRATEGY

As a provider of nurseries, the St. Nikolausstiftung strives to remove taboos from the topic of sexual violence by sensitising its staff to the issue and putting in place transparent structures and procedures for the prevention of (sexual) assault.

These include teaching practices that respect children's feelings, needs and boundaries, take them seriously and promote self-confidence. Teachers aim to create an environment that helps children to understand that their bodies are unique and worthy of protection,

and where they learn to pay attention to their own feelings and to be aware of, respect and safeguard the feelings of others.

The training programme includes courses on prevention, sexual violence and sex education for teachers and assistants. The aim is to enable teachers to engage at a professional level with the topic of prevention so as to enable them – on the basis of their observations – to address issues with children sensitively and holistically, using appropriate language and taking a personal approach that is appropriate to their ages and stages of development.

Transition from nursery to school

In principle children are being prepared for school from their first day at nursery. When children are running around in the garden, for example, or painting big circles on a piece of paper, they are developing the preparatory skills that will help them learn

to write later. Children learn holistically: they capture information about shapes, surfaces and spaces automatically and with all their senses.



As an educational institution we are aware that transitions (e.g. from nursery to school) have to be well-designed in order to make it easier for children to cope with the demands it will make of their development. We therefore pay particular attention to children's education in their final year at nursery, just as we do at induction. Our educational strategy aims to provide children in their final year at nursery with planned and targeted educational stimuli in the form of 'research group' projects, outings, visits to concerts or even nearby schools alongside others of the same age. We place great emphasis on empowering children socially and emotionally, because this is the best way of helping them take the next step – progressing to the next educational institution.

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THE FINAL YEAR AT NURSERY

On their way from nursery to becoming schoolchildren, children are increasingly able to understand and complete work assignments, meet challenges, and deal more easily with frustration (e.g. having to wait). As they grow up, they develop interests in drawing, writing and reading and life in the community, and also the ability to play an active role in groups (including outside the nursery).



An insight into our working methods

Planning and observation

All teachers plan their daily teaching in accordance with the St. Nikolausstiftung planning concept. This provides teachers with an instrument that guides them and assists them in putting their plans into practice. It is strongly influenced by the issues that children bring with them to nursery.

Because education happens when children bring their interests with them to daily life at the nursery and are taken seriously. If children are enthusiastic about something, then learning happens almost in passing. If a digger is excavating the street in front

of the nursery, for instance, children will re-enact this in the sandbox, for example. This kind of play enables them to learn persistence, social skills creativity and much more – and the learning all comes from the children. The teacher makes the right tools available to them, provides a reference book on the topic and maybe discusses with the children whether one of them has a mother who is an architect, for example, whom they could invite to tell the children more about her work. And the children might begin to draw plans and try to recreate these in the building area.

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OBSERVATION OF INDIVIDUAL CHILDREN

Teachers are tasked with observing children's activity and preparing materials and stimuli that are appropriate for their stage of development. Observing children helps teachers to become familiar with how children think and what ideas they have, and to record children's intentions and interests. It helps to understand what children are thinking and doing, and how to provide a specialist response to their intentions and activities. (Cf. Marjan Alemzadeh/Gerd E. Schäfer

www.wahrnehmendes-beobachten.de) Teachers use selected observation techniques to observe individual children depending on the circumstances. They deploy them on a daily basis depending on the situation and discuss the insights they have gained with a colleague, the special educational needs teacher or the management. This specialist exchange helps them to assess children's abilities better and then prepare suitable stimuli for the child in question.



Our peripatetic services Support, advice and assistance

The St.Nikolausstiftung peripatetic team includes special educational needs teachers, and occupational therapy and psychology specialists. The responsibilities of special educational needs teachers include assessing and supporting children's development (see Info box on page 22 for details), advising parents and providing specialist assistance to teachers and the entire group. Occupational therapists and psychologists provide child-centred advice and support to parents and guardians.

Our experts are also able to provide rapid specialist, organisational and personal support for difficult situations and crises. If a staff member becomes seriously ill or dies, for example, it may be that the team will need support.

The composition of the peripatetic support team staff responsible for your nursery is displayed at your nursery.

This is why teachers take note of what children are interested in and reflect on how they can get children involved in learning. The knowledge they derive from this feeds into preparation of the learning environment, planning the daily routine and selecting what stimuli to use.

“Dialogic educational portfolio”

Children's autonomy and their ability to take pleasure in learning and discovering is at the centre of our approach to education. Each child has what we call a portfolio, where with the help of their teacher they file everything that inspires them, what they have discovered, thought and made, skills they have acquired, things they have learned, and everything that is important to them. Your child will record or photograph special moments and ask their teacher to write down their description of the event – thus documenting key moments in their development.

Decisions on what to put into the portfolio are taken dialogically, i.e. in discussion between child and teacher, and are guided by children's interests and needs. We also invite you as parents to enter important family events in the portfolio in discussion with your child.

The portfolio belongs to your child. It can be accessed by your child at any time and your child decides whether and with whom s/he wants to look at the portfolio. Pages chosen in discussion with your child are given to them along with nursery documentation when they move on to school – at the end of their time at nursery your child will take the whole folder home with them.





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ASSESSMENT OF DEVELOPMENT

A selected combination of fun tasks are used to gain an overview of fine and gross motor skills (movement), language, cognitive capabilities (thinking) and social and emotional skills. Development is assessed in a relaxed atmosphere free of any pressure to perform. The observations of the teacher in charge of the group provide valuable input to complete the overall picture. The aim is to provide your child with the best possible, individualised support to meet his/her needs.

Development assessment procedure

Assessment of development is a unique preventative service offered by the St. Nikolausstiftung. In the Autumn, special educational needs teachers carry out play-based assessment of the development of all 4- and 5-year-olds. This assessment is intended to supplement ongoing observation by teachers in the course of their teaching in the nursery. The two methods allow the strengths and development needs of children to be identified early and resources provided to support them as necessary.

You will have the opportunity to discuss what has been observed, and your child's development, with the relevant special educational needs teacher at a consultation day, which will be advertised in advance. Feedback is also provided to teachers, so that it can inform their work accordingly.





Educational partnership

Preliminary parent-teacher meetings

In order to take account of the different learning rhythms and ways of life of individuals, and to be able to create a learning environment that promotes children's development, we need some basic information from children's primary care givers. When your child starts nursery you will be invited to a discussion with his/her teacher, where you will talk about issues such as your family situation, your child's routines, what s/he particularly likes to eat, what helps when your child is sad, and how far along your child's development is. This information is important to enable the teacher to make nursery a familiar experience for your child. e.g. they might provide a wooden railway set because they know that your child loves trains, or they will make sure your child takes their teddy bear with them when they go to sleep because this is what they do at home.

The initial discussion is thus the basis for providing your child with individualised support and is part of our commitment to an educational partnership.

Development discussions

Once a year, mothers and/or fathers or guardians are invited to a development discussion at the nursery. This discussion

is based on teacher observation (see Info box page 19) of your child. The aim is to exchange information and provide a 'benevolent perspective' of your child's development, identifying potential and discussing what stage of development s/he is at, both at nursery and at home.

Parents are the experts on their children and teachers are experts when it comes to the nursery system. Mutual recognition of this expertise will ensure the development discussion is an open and collaborative conversation about issues relating to your child and to the benefit of your child.

The aim of the development discussion is to work in partnership to take a positive and uncontentious view of your child's educational development, and plan next steps as necessary. Development discussions are required by law and part of the educational work of the nursery.

Crises, conflicts or other emergencies that might arise in nursery or in families will be discussed at as early a stage as possible and not addressed for the first time in development discussions.

Your contacts...



...for educational and administrative issues

Your child's teacher is in principle your first point of contact for all general questions relating to your child and the group. For administrative, organisational and all other matters concerning the nursery, please contact the relevant nursery management.

For any questions or problems that cannot be resolved by management, please contact the regional inspector.

Peripatetic services: Psychologists and occupational therapists can be contacted where there is a challenging situation concerning your child. Special educational needs teachers are the contacts for issues relating to assessment of development or where children are receiving on-site support on a daily basis.

Please contact the Accounts Department for any questions relating to invoicing. You will find all relevant contact details on our website.

YOUR NURSERY

TEACHER

- Daily routine/everyday issues
- Development, child's interests
- Education

MANAGEMENT

- Contract (supervision hours, registering for/cancelling meals, cancellation...)
- Nursery educational strategy
- Feedback

ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE

INSPECTORS

- Nursery quality

PERIPATETIC SERVICES

- Assessment of development, issues relating to your child's development
- Advice on situations your child is finding challenging (educational issues, divorce...)

ACCOUNTS

- Billing (meals, special activities etc.)
- Payment collection and instalment plans
- Tax office confirmations (up to 2018)

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