Introduction to MECS Kindergarten
Mount Evelyn Christian School

MECS Vision
Seeking the Kingdom of God in Education

MECS Mission
We provide a holistic and dynamic Christ-centred Early Years program shaped by teacher-guided, explorative, play-based learning experiences, that nurtures a rich foundation for school

‘Hearts & Hands’
Kindergarten Philosophy

Each child is wonderfully created, powerful, capable and full of curiosity about the world. This is central to our Philosophy and practice.

Children are created uniquely, made in the image of God with different gifts and talents. As educators, we are called to respect these distinctions by building intentional relationships, and through modelling and teaching as we respond to the children as individuals who are loved by God.

MECS Kindergarten belongs to the wider MECS community and shares the values and vision of the school. The Primary school culture statement of “Strong Hearts, Strong Minds,” has been adopted and adapted for the kindergarten to “Hearts and Hands.” We aim to nurture children’s hearts towards God’s Kingdom; it is this development of Christian attitudes that leads us to the work of our hands by giving opportunities to express values, such as being friendly, respectful and caring of each other and the environment around us.

At the MECS Kindergarten we value the development of close relationships between staff, parents and children, and see this as foundational for building a special, inclusive community where the children know themselves to be secure, safe, respected and loved. In this environment, students enjoy the best possible start to their years of formal education.

We recognise that families are diverse and unique. In our day-to-day planning we consider children’s varied needs and interests, individual learning styles, background and cultural diversity in the context of the family and kindergarten.

At the MECS Kindergarten, as well as catering for the potential of each student, we respond to the children’s appetite for knowledge by embracing play-based and engaging learning. Our educators support the students as they take new steps in their learning; cultivating the skills of asking questions and problem-solving, and nurturing their curiosity. The program is full of opportunities for learning through hands on exploration, discovery and investigation.

At the MECS Kindergarten we respect the uniqueness of childhood, and provide a broad range of developmentally appropriate, educational experiences. We strive for a program that challenges each child in their learning and which helps them to progress and grow in as many areas of knowledge, skill and performance as possible. Above all, children are encouraged to be the best ‘you’.
Welcome

Welcome to the MECS Kindergarten. We are delighted that you are considering partnering with us in Christian Education. We know that starting kindergarten is one of the first steps in a life long journey of learning.

Early Learning at MECS

MECS Kindergarten provides 3 and 4 year old sessional kindergarten and playgroup, and, by having all these early learning programs on the same campus as the school, allows a smooth and lovely transition to Prep.

These early years are the foundation on which a child’s education is built. The MECS Kindergarten program is designed to build skills and extend each child’s range of experiences, in a happy and settled atmosphere, where positive relationships are highly valued. We respect and celebrate the varying interests and strengths of each child, and create a flexible program to embrace these – a program that acknowledges and accommodates various stages of growth and development within each child, all encompassed in the exciting discovery of God’s wondrous creation.

A range of communication, observation and documentation techniques are used to provide information to staff, to assist them in planning play experiences for individuals and for the group as a whole.

Play is the work of children. What better way to find out how the world works than through play? Play can be described as discovery, exploration and experimentation. It naturally increases a child’s sense of curiosity, imagination and inventiveness; it is evidenced as being a vital part of human development. A child develops through play in the areas of language and communication, cognitive thinking, reasoning, relationship and social interactions and emotional resilience. This helps them move toward independence. These skills are foundational for further learning. While formal academic learning is not a part of the MECS kindergarten program, children are exposed to concepts that they will be introduced to when they begin school.

MECS Kindergarten offers a beginning in Christian education and a natural transition to school. We have opportunities to connect with the Primary School through involvement in school activities, and through visiting various areas of the school such as the library, multipurpose room and oval, creating an awareness of belonging to a wider community, while still being protected in an age appropriate setting. Friendships established between children and families can continue beyond the kindergarten years.

Our beautiful new facilities have been intentionally designed to be welcoming to children, to promote indoor/outdoor learning, and to encourage contact between different groups. Our playground is designed with the natural environment in mind to encourage investigation and exploration, including a dry creek bed, flexible climbing space, large sandpit, bike track and vegetable patches.

The building has an entry foyer called the ‘piazza’, or meeting place, where families are invited to gather together to promote community and build relationships.

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**4 Year Old Program Staff**

**Early Learning Coordinator & 4 Year Old Program Teacher:**

*Mrs Wendy Mason*
Diploma of Teaching (Early Childhood), Bachelor of Education (Primary), Graduate Diploma (Music)

**4 Year Old Program Teacher:**

*Mrs Cherie Izzard*
Bachelor of Early Childhood Studies

**4 Year Old Program Assistants:**

*Mrs Robyn Peck*
Certificate III Children’s Services

*Mrs Andrea North*
Currently undertaking studies in Certificate III Children’s Services

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**3 Year Old Program Staff**

**3 Year Old Program Teacher:**

*Mrs Lee Koole*
Diploma of Community Services (Children’s Services)

**3 Year Old Program Assistant:**

*Mrs Karen Grant*
Certificate III Children’s Services

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**Playgroup Leader**

*Mrs Veronica Sargent*
Diploma of Children’s Services; currently undertaking studies in Bachelor of Education (Early Childhood and Primary)
Kinder Hours of Operation and Calendar

The Kindergarten terms will be in line with the MECS calendar. Please check the MECS school calendar for term dates and upcoming school events. You will notice that at MECS, the length and structure of the terms are a bit different to that of the State system. This is because we provide our staff with 'workbreaks' – time when the staff are working, but the students do not attend. This provides teachers with valuable time for the development of Christian education and our school based curriculum.

Fees

MECS Kindergarten fees are structured to incorporate all educational activities and expenses involved with the program, including special visitors to the centre (incursions) and excursions.

In 2013, the fees per school term are as follows:

- 3 year old kindergarten year: $380 per term
- 4 year old kindergarten year: $440 per term
- Playgroup: $40 per family per term

Please note that kindergarten fees are not eligible to be included in the MECS sibling discount program, or the MECS fee ceiling amount.

The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) contributes funding toward the costs of providing a four-year-old kindergarten program. The balance of costs is financed through fees and financial support from MECS.

The DEECD also provides a Kindergarten Fee Subsidy that enables children from eligible families to attend a four-year-old kindergarten program free of charge, or at a minimal cost. Families who may be eligible for the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy (four-year-old programs only) include those who hold a:

- Health Care Card, Pensioner Concession Card, Department of Veterans' Affairs Gold Card, Temporary Protection/Humanitarian Visa 447, 451, 785 or 786, Asylum Seeker's Bridging Visa A–F; Refugee and Special Humanitarian Visa 200–217; Resolution of Status (RoS) visa, Class CD, subclass 851;
- Or who are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander children or Triplets or quadruplets attending a funded kindergarten program in the same year.

The DEECD has an additional funding option to assist eligible three-year-old Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, and children known to Child Protection, to access kindergarten programs.

For more information in relation to these subsidies, please contact the MECS school office.

Orientation

Kindergarten orientation occurs for the first 2 weeks of Term 1. This involves shorter sessions and smaller groups, allowing the children to settle in and gently get used to the routines of kindergarten.
Educational Program

The 3 and 4 year old program operates within the Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia. There are five outcomes for children’s learning in this framework:

Outcome 1: Children have a strong sense of identity
Outcome 2: Children are connected with and contribute to their world.
Outcome 3: Children have a strong sense of wellbeing.
Outcome 4: Children are confident and involved learners.
Outcome 5: Children are effective communicators.

These outcomes will be incorporated into the overall program planning.

At MECS, our approach to Christian education means that all teaching is from a Biblical perspective. The teaching program is intentional with overarching questions and identified learning outcomes that lead children to an understanding that our world has been created by God, we are His people and we are loved by Him; we are to love Him and to love each other and we can show this by caring for each other and the world around us.

The program incorporates regular play experiences such as inventing with recycled materials, using open ended construction sets (such as blocks, lego, duplo, magnetic sets, mobilo), art experiences, dramatic play areas, writing and drawing area, cognitive games, sensory activities, reading books and a nature and discovery table. Children’s interests and strengths are factored into the program.

The following is an example of what our program may follow:

3 Year Old Program

Beginning at Kindergarten– God is with me
• I can be safe
• I can make choices
• I can help
• I can make friends
• What can I do?

Who made the rainbow? God promises
• What colours go where?
• What happens when we mix colours?
• Dots and stripes

What size is it? God is diverse
• Large animals– God made dinosaurs
• Small animals– God made tiny minibeasts

This goes with that. God is orderly
• Matching colours, shapes, people with occupations, homes to animals.
• The Shape of Things: Shape helps things have purpose.
• Pattern that– God created and sustains order in the world.

Where does it come from? God provides
• What is a farm animal?
• What can be farmed?
• How do farmers care for these animals?

Does it make sense? God made me
• I can see, hear, feel, smell & taste

Celebrations; God loves us
• Christmas: The Birth of Jesus

4 Year Old Program

Where do I belong?
• Me- God made me unique
• My family- People are special
• My community- God cares
• Friendships- God helps

Where in the world do I live?
• Buildings and homes- God provides
• Australia is our home- People have differences
• Countries in the world- People are unique
• On the move- Transport. People are creative

What is happening around us? Creation. God made the world and everything in it.
• Light and Dark- Shadows
• A sea of colour-water, colours have a purpose
• The Land- God created this earth and sustains green growing things
• Out of this world – God created the universe
• Fish and Feather-under the sea, birds of the air
• All creatures large and small

People-God loves us
• People care for each other
• People live in community-occupations
• What/How do you celebrate?
• Christmas: The birth of Jesus
Learning Stories
During each child's time at Kindergarten, we will capture various aspects of their experience in a number of ways, and create a ‘Learning Story’ for each child. The Learning Story may take on a different look and feel for each child, and will be available for the child and parents to look at any time. This allows us to capture and reflect exciting discoveries, amazing creations, special artwork and other aspects of each child's Kindergarten experience.

Perceptual Motor Program
Children in the 4 year old program will participate in a Perceptual Motor Program (PMP) commencing in Term 2 or 3. The PMP program is formulated to build children's body awareness in space, balance, direction and simultaneous use of both sides of the brain through specially designed large-body activities. These activities are important for the development of pre-reading and writing skills.

Guiding Children’s Behaviour
Establishing a warm and caring learning environment is a high priority at MECS. We acknowledge that children are learning to regulate their own behaviour, and the kindergarten staff are committed to helping children achieve this. We want to help each child develop positive social strengths, by encouraging cooperation with others, interacting in positive ways and enhancing their own and others' self-esteem.

Each staff member will treat each child with gentleness, sensitivity, respect and understanding. If behaviour is becoming a concern, parents will be approached so that we can work together to encourage positive behaviour.

A set of guidelines to create a cooperative learning environment, which include safety and caring for others, is established with each group of children at the beginning of the year. This helps to build a positive class culture, and children are more likely to own and maintain responsibility for the class behaviour standards.

MECS Kindergarten uses Restorative Discipline, an approach which assists children in understanding that when poor choices are made, things go wrong and relationships are damaged. Children learn to take responsibility for their actions and behaviour. It helps them understand that there are consequences for our behaviour. This approach acknowledges each person's perspective, helps to build relationships and helps children work towards restoring the problem. Children learn that issues and problems can be worked through, resulting in forgiveness, healing and restoration. We believe that this process is in line with a Christian perspective that we forgive each other as God forgives us. We seek restoration of relationships, as God does with us.

Staff follow a simple process by asking the following questions:

1. **What is the problem?** We help children identify what went wrong, and understand that the child is not the problem, the problem is the problem.

2. **Who is affected?** We help children recognise their own and other children's emotions, and help them identify what questions/actions to implement when they experience anger/upset feelings.

3. **How can we fix the problem?** We help children apologise and implement consequences that will help to restore the relationship or the situation.

4. **How can we make sure this doesn’t happen again?** We help children identify why it happened and what underpinned that action that caused the problem. Consequences appropriately applied help the child consolidate their understanding.

Restorative Discipline works hand in hand with the development of social skills and community building.
Rest

Being in a large group of peers can be very tiring for young children. Areas for rest and quiet play are available in the kindergarten rooms, and children are encouraged to make use of these areas.

Inclusion

We recognise that all children are wonderfully made in God's image, whilst also recognising that some children have additional learning or development needs. Our staff model warm, accepting attitudes and actively encourage children to be accepting of each other’s similarities and differences. Our program allows children of various abilities and stages of development to participate and benefit, regardless of their abilities, additional needs or medical conditions.

Teachers make regular observations and assessments of each child's development, however parents have intimate knowledge of their child and are therefore a vital component in the effective inclusion of any child with additional needs. The kindergarten teacher can consult with the MECS Educational Support Coordinator to make the best decisions for your child. If we consider that there could be value in consulting relevant outside support services, we will approach the parents to discuss this.

It is essential that parents accurately reflect, at the time of enrolment, any known additional needs.

Transition to School

Having the kindergarten located right next to the Prep rooms allows wonderful transition-to-school opportunities. All the way through the kinder program, the opportunity to visit other areas of the school allows for a gradual introduction to wider school life. In the 4 year old program, we start intentional transition activities in Term 4 to introduce the children to Prep and encourage a smooth transition.

Enrolment

If you are considering enrolling your child at MECS kindergarten, you can obtain a Application for Enrolment form, from the school office. You may choose to apply for Kindergarten and ongoing enrolment (i.e. school), or for Kindergarten only. The process for ongoing enrolment involves a meeting with the Registrar or Principal, and guarantees your child a place in Prep, when your application is approved. Kindergarten only enrolment does not ensure a place in Preps for the year your child will begin school.

Children may be enrolled in 3 year old kindergarten if they have turned 3 years of age prior to commencing the year.

Children may be enrolled in 4 year old kindergarten if they turn 4 prior to April 30, the year they commence.

It is strongly advised that children starting school at MECS turn 6 years of age during the year they commence Prep. With this in mind, we encourage parents to carefully consider the year children commence kindergarten. This is a crucial decision in setting your child up for 13 years of formal school education. We believe that the early years are foundational for further learning, and that children are better equipped to be fully engaged and involved at an older age, having had time to grow and develop the necessary skills to manage school life, such as regulating their own behaviour, resilience, concentration, listening in a group situation and following specific instructions. MECS Kindergarten helps children transition smoothly into school by intentionally teaching and giving children opportunities to develop these skills.